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INCREDIBLE MACHINE PG. 80

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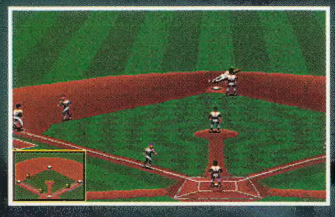

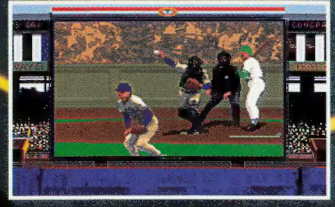

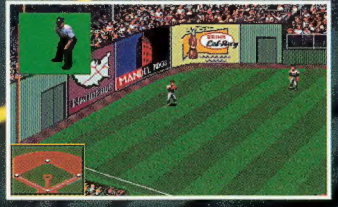

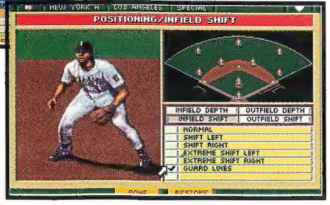

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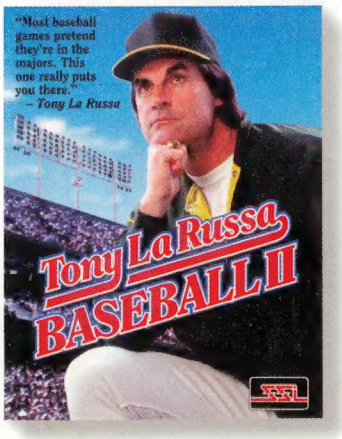
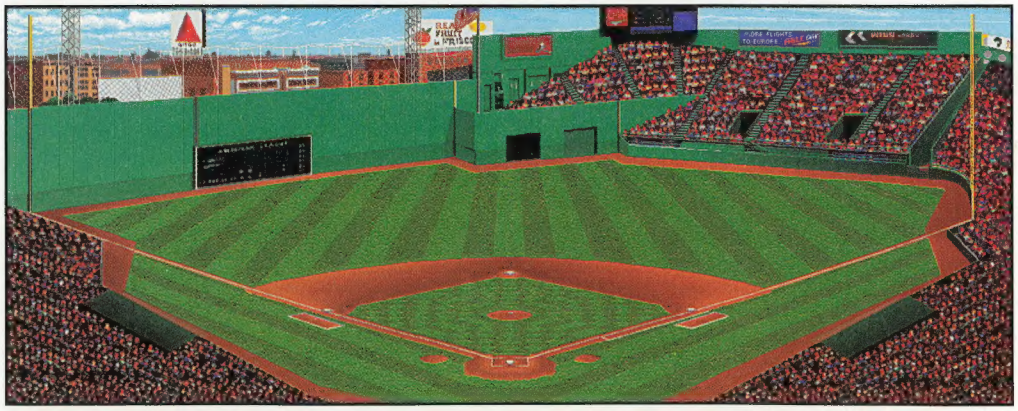
THE SEASON BEGINS NOW.

Fact is, Tony La Russa won't put his name on anything less than the best. If you're looking for true baseball action, the name of the game is TONY LA RUSSA BASEBALL II.





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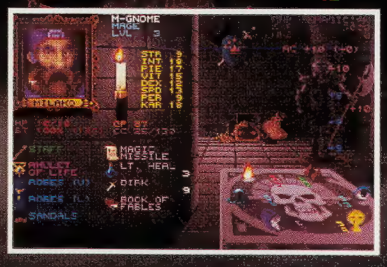
Wizardry I

A Fantasy Role-Playing Simulation by D.W. Bradley

CRUSADERS *of the* DARK SAVANT



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PC GAMES
APRIL/MAY 1993

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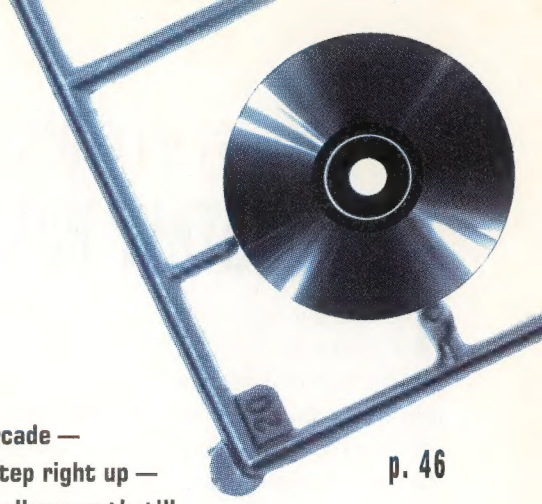

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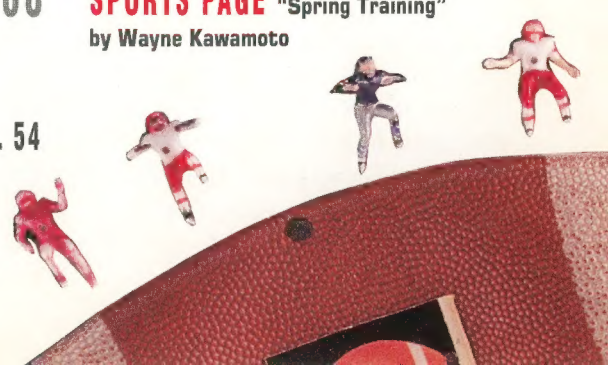

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EDITOR'S PAGE

AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT A HOUND DOG

To the average game player, a walk through the aisles of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) is both a dream come true *and* an exercise in overload: Eardrum-busting noise, enough pixel power to ruin the hardiest retinas, and screens that entice, Siren-like, until you start shouting "Gimme, gimme, gimme!" You'd think you'd died and gone to game heaven.

But to a trained professional — that's me, believe it or not — CES is just another place to sniff out stories. Like one of those dogs at Customs, I've got my nose in other people's business. Here are a few scents — maybe some even *make* sense — from my digital olfactories.

• **Same old, same old.** Sure, there was lots of new stuff at January's Winter CES, but just as important was the old stuff. Some games have been shown at so many CESes they're old news even *before* they're released. Origin's Strike Commander, for instance, wowed the crowds one more time. Out real soon now. Right. Buzz Aldrin's Race into Space, a nifty multimedia-style simulation of the space race between the Soviets (remember them?) and the Americans (that's us), and Jordan In-Flight, a sports game featuring Michael Jordan, again inhabited booths at CES, not store shelves.

• **Kid stuff.** The predicted blizzard of kids' software finally swept into town this CES. Every publisher with two developers to rub together seems to want a piece of the lucrative pie once owned by Davidson, The Learning Company, and Broderbund. Electronic Arts' spread of five kids' games was the best of the new bunch, its Peter Pan the best of the quintet. But the new kids on the kids'-software block better be willing to take a bath — it's going to be harder than they think to break into the market.

• **Bailing out?** If you didn't know better, you'd think *disk* was a dirty word to some publishers. Accolade, for instance, didn't show a single new PC title of its own, relying instead on a slew of Sega and Nintendo video games to fill its booth. And if Electronic Arts hadn't either acquired or signed agreements with just about every disk-based Tom, Dick, and Harry, its video-game catalogue would outnumber the PC offerings by at least 10 to 1.

• **My life and welcome to it, part II.** If everything's a sequel, what's original? Enough Roman numerals flew around CES to do Caesar's taxes. Lemmings 2: The Tribes, Empire Deluxe, Tony La Russa Baseball II, Magic Candle III, F-15 Strike Eagle III, Kyrandia II, Virtual Reality Studio 2.0, Prince of Persia II, Ultima Underworld II, and Space Quest V were just a few of the Part IIs. I can't wait to turn 45 and pick up a copy of Ultima XVII.

• **Vegas beats virtual any day.** Winter CES holds court in Las Vegas, home of a zillion light bulbs and almost as many down-on-their-luck gamblers. For all the promise of casino-on-a-disk games of chance, the PC still can't hold a candle to the real thing. Best bet of the show's four days? No, not the three-minute preview of Interplay's new role-playing game, StoneKeep, but $20 on the hard 8 at a craps table at Circus Circus. Now, *that's* the way to make a trained professional's dream come true. **— Gregg Keizer, Consulting Editor**

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* HEY, IT WORKED ONCE! *This photo was a Lampoon cover in 1973. We're happy to report the dog died of natural causes.*

By Wayne Kawamoto

PCG CURRENTS

CD LIGHTS

One of the strongest trends in PC gaming today is CD-ROM (*compact-disc read-only memory*). At the 1993 Winter Consumer Electronics Show, held last January in Las Vegas, a number of software manufacturers announced enhanced compact-disc editions of existing (floppy-based) titles, as well as new ones written expressly for the CD-ROM platform.

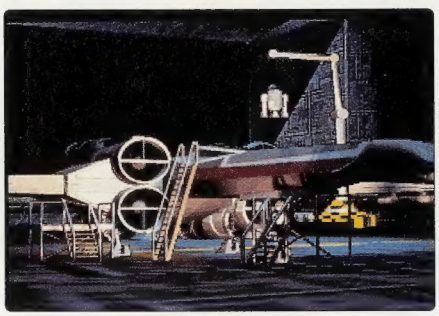
Consuming 30 megabytes of space, Electronic Arts' **Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes** (San Mateo, CA) took last year's award for biggest hard-disk hog. Great game, but if you need room on your drive for incidental things like, say, a word processor, you'll be happy to know that EA is releasing a CD-ROM version of the game (price undetermined at press time). For information, call Electronic Arts at (415) 513-7555.

Interplay (Santa Ana, CA) announced several titles on compact disc, including **Lord of the Rings** and **SimCity** (prices undetermined at press time). In addition, **Star Trek: 25th Anniversary** (price undetermined) will reach the CD-ROM final frontier in an upcoming version. For information, call Interplay at (714) 553-6678.

Day of the Tentacle: You've never seen anything like this on This Old House. Maniac Mansion's second rendition is fun, whacky, and deliciously spooky.

A newcomer to the States is the British company I-Motion, which is creating a CD-ROM version of its **Alone in the Dark** (price undetermined) for American audiences. In this one, you explore a creepy 3D haunted house rendered in animated polygon-fill graphics. For more information, contact I-Motion at 071/738-8199.

LucasArts (San Rafael, CA) previewed its upcoming title **X-Wing** ($69.95) on floppy disk. It's a flight simulator based on the exploits of the fighter ships of the same name made famous in the movie *Star Wars*. The upcoming CD-ROM version of the game will be called **Rebel Assault** (price undetermined at press time).



Gorgeous graphics make X-Wing soar.

Also on CD-ROM, LucasArts announced enhanced "talkie" versions of **Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis** and a sequel to an earlier game, **Maniac Mansion 2: Day of the Tentacle** (prices undetermined). For details, call LucasArts at (415) 721-3333.

Where's Indy? Riding to the rescue in the CD-ROM version of Fate of Atlantis.

Humongous Entertainment (Woodinville, WA) announced the second title in its **Junior Adventures** line: **Fatty Bear's Birthday Surprise** ($49.95 disk, $59.95 CD-ROM). Fatty is your average cuddly teddy bear; he's a regular stuffed animal around adults, but comes to life with kids. (Hmm . . . sounds like a certain comic-strip tiger we know.) Fatty is organizing a party for kids on CD-ROM. For more information, call Humongous at (206) 485-1212.

Psygnosis (Brookline, MA), best known for those oh-so-cute Lemmings, announced two new products for CD-ROM. **Dracula** ($69.99) is an interactive game based on the recent Francis Ford Coppola film and will feature some 15 minutes of movie footage, plus rotoscoped characters. In **Microcosm** ($69.99), you'll explore the inner workings of the human body, *Fantastic Voyage*-style. Watch out for those hungry white blood cells and tight capillaries. For details, call Psygnosis at (617) 731-3553.

Ebook (Union City, CA) unveiled three new CD-ROM additions to the company's line of multimedia storybooks. **Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp** ($49.95) features a compact-disc version of the adventures of the *Arabian Nights* hero. Offering poetry and nice blues music, **Trouble in Mind** ($49.95) tells of a man who comes home to regain his past. **Kaa'sHunting** ($39.95) is an adventure starring Mowgli and the famous rock python, based on Kipling's *Jungle Book*. For details, call Ebook at (510) 429-1331.

MicroLeague (Newark, DE), known for statistical sports games, is offering a CD-ROM version of its flagship title **MicroLeague Baseball 4** ($49.95). Game enhancements include modem play, close-up video, and additional teams and stadiums. For information, call MicroLeague at (302) 368-9990.

Virgin Games (Irvine, CA) announced CD-ROM versions of **Dune** ($69.99) and **Legend of Kyrandia** ($69.99), along

with a floppy-disk release, **Kyrandia II** ($59.99). For details, contact Virgin at (714) 833-8710.

Spectrum HoloByte (Alameda, CA) is offering **Iron Helix** ($99.95), an interactive science-fiction adventure on CD-ROM. You control a probe aboard an enemy spacecraft; your task is to maneuver it carefully through the ship (the probe's cameras are your eyes and ears) while avoid the security system. For more information, call Spectrum HoloByte at (510) 522-3584.

Software Sorcery (San Diego, CA) is due to release **Jutland** ($89.95), a CD-ROM-based World War I naval simulation, featuring plenty of realistic images and sounds, digitized voice commands, video clips, SVGA and VGA graphics screens, and fine production-quality music. For information, call Software Sorcery at (619) 452-9901.

Just about everyone has glued together a Revell-Monogram (Morton Grove, IL) model at least once in his life. Now the company is distributing model plans, guides, and realistic road-race simulations featuring exotic sports cars on CD-ROM — along with an authentic plastic model (price undetermined at press time, glue not included). Call Revell-Monogram at (708) 966-3500 for details.

Rags to Riches: You'll need both strategy and luck if you want to make a killing in the stock-market game.

MORE INTERPLAY

The Lost Vikings ($49.95) is the name of an upcoming Interplay (Santa Ana, CA) release. An alien space ship has snatched three Norse characters: Erik the Swift, Baleog the Fierce, and Olaf the Stout. Your job is to help them pool their collective talents and find their way home.

Also new from Interplay is **Rags to Riches** ($59.95), a stock-market simulation game. Here you'll climb the socio-economic ladder as you make your fortune in stocks and options. For more information, contact Interplay at (714) 553-6678, or toll-free at (800) 969-GAME for customer service and orders.

THE AIR AND THE GAMES ARE CLEAR UP HERE

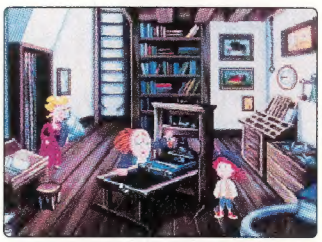
Way up in the High Sierra is perched the mountains' famous namesake software company, and with inspiration like that, something bold and innovative is bound to result. And Sierra On-Line (Coarsegold, CA) has indeed slated several creative new "edutainment" titles for release in '93.

Sassy kibitzers keep you on your toes in the updated Hoyle Book of Games.

For the environmentally minded, **The Lost Secret of the Rainforest** ($49.95) brings back Adam of the original EcoQuest game, who tries to preserve the South American region's delicate ecosystem.

You can study our nation's past from a somewhat unusual perspective in Sierra's new **Twisty History** ($49.95). Apparently, the 1960s find their way into the life of that cool colonial cat Ben Franklin. Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and really groovy.

Alphabet Blocks ($49.95), from Sierra affiliate Bright Star Technology, helps preschoolers learn their ABCs. A second title in development



Twisty History: The '60s live again, with help from time-traveling Ben Franklin.

POTPOURRI

The folks at Megatech Software (Torrance, CA), creators of the racy adventure Cobra Mission, have announced DRAGON KNIGHT III and ROBOT FIGHTER (prices undetermined at press time), two upcoming releases that promise still more titillating interactive fare. Call Megatech at (310) 539-9177.

Activision (Los Angeles, CA) is releasing RETURN TO ZORK ($69.95) — not a text adventure, but something the company calls a "multimedia sequel." (That's progress, folks.) Call Activision at (310) 207-4500.

MECC (Minneapolis, MN) is offering a VGA edition of its "edutainment" role-play product OREGON TRAIL ($69). You'll play the part of a settler in the 19th century, as you journey from Missouri to Oregon in a covered wagon. Call MECC at (800) 685-6322.

Holy sequel! Konami (Buffalo Grove, IL) has announced the soon-to-be-released BATMAN RETURNS (price undetermined). The game features that fly-by-night Gotham City good guy as he puts up with still more from the pugnacious Penguin and the sultry Catwoman. Call Konami at (708) 215-5100.

MicroProse's latest plans include a new Civil War game written by SID MEIER, designer of hit games such as Covert Action, Pirates!, and, most recently, Civilization. Call MicroProse at (410) 771-1151.

In recent sporting news, Accolade (San Jose, CA) has signed St. Louis Blues star BRETT HULL to endorse an upcoming line of hockey games. Also, the legendary PELE will endorse a future soccer product as part of Accolade's GAMES WITH PERSONALITY line. Call Accolade at (800) 245-7744.

In the works at Software Toolworks (Novato, CA) is BATTLETOADS ($39.95), warts and all. In this popular Nintendo game now ported to the PC, the Dark Queen has kidnapped Princess Angelica and her sidekick, Pimple, and — surprise — you have to save them. Just pray you get there before the Dark Queen takes some Oxy-5 to Pimple. Call Software Toolworks at (415) 883-3000.

will focus on word sounds and spelling. Sounds as though the Bright Star line will grow with a child's reading ability.

Sierra's partner, the French company Coktel Vision, is releasing the math and reading programs **Adi Jr.: Volume I** and **Volume II** ($59.95 each), plus three adventures: **Inca** ($59.95), in which you do battle and solve puzzles to bring back the lost empire; **Prophecy** ($39.95), featuring an evil sorcerer set on seizing a kingdom; and **Gobliiins 2** ($39.95), starring Fingus and Winkle, two new imps who try to rescue King Angoulafre's son. Of course, Fingus is serious, polite and careful, while Winkle is a reckless joker.

Al Lowe of Leisure Suit Larry fame (or infamy) stars in an upcoming release called **Freddy Pharkus, Frontier Pharmacist** ($69.95). The setting is the Old West, with a *Blazing Saddles* type of attitude.

Roger Wilco makes a comeback in **Space Quest V: The Next Mutation** ($69.95). This time your favorite space janitor is a starship captain trying to track down some intergalactic chump who's dumping biohazardous waste.

Sierra is also readying a remake of the company's **Hoyle Book of Games Volume I** ($49.95), with updated 256-color VGA graphics as well as digitized speech. Two new games, bridge and euchre, join the original Crazy 8s, Old Maid, gin rummy, hearts, cribbage, and Klondike solitaire.

Sierra's Dynamix affiliate will release its first fantasy role-playing game in **Betrayal of Krondor** ($69.95), based on Raymond Feist's *Riftwar Legacy* series of novels. The program will feature digitized actors and some 2500 frames of rotoscoped animation, using Dynamix's own "three-space" technology for first-person perspective.

Dynamix is also offering **Aces Over Europe** ($29.95), featuring P-51 Mustang, Focke-Wulfe 190, and Me-262 jet fighters. Players can choose to be German Luftwaffe, British RAF, or U.S. Air Force. For details, call Sierra at (800) 326-6654.

WHERE OH WHERE HAS MY CARMEN GONE?

If you thought that lovable bandit Carmen Sandiego had gone underground (and you haven't been watching your local public TV station), we've got good news: She's now back on disk for another round. At Winter CES in January, Broderbund (Novato, CA) previewed the upcoming **Where in Space Is Carmen Sandiego?** (price undetermined at press time). While trying to find Carmen, you can utilize the game's VAL 9000 computer, an entire online database that will feature actual digitized NASA images of planetary systems. (Hey, wasn't that Shufflepuck Cafe?)

For Prince of Persia fans, Broderbund also showed the sequel, **Prince of Persia II: The Shadow and the Flame** (price undetermined), at CES. The game will feature the series' famous animation style along with a variety of new locales. For details, call Broderbund at (415) 382-4400.

She's back . . . . Carmen's beyond the stars in Where in Space?

DO THE WAVE

The next wave crashing onto the PC game scene is Tsunami (Oakhurst, CA), in a new partnership with Accolade. Their upcoming line features four titles.

Blue Force ($69.95) is an interactive police role-playing adventure that promises "gut-wrenching real-life drama." If that sounds something like Police Quest, could be because they share the same author, Jim Wall.

Other adventure games bearing the Tsunami crest are **Ringworld** ($69.95), based on the books by Larry Niven, and **Protostar** ($69.95).

Last but certainly not least, **Wacky Funsters** ($29.95) promises a laugh a minute in five parody games. It's Rambi vs. Blambo in **Operation Wolf**, starring a Bambi-like deer armed to the antlers with an assault rifle. Other games with names like **Ping**, **Steroids**, **Big Guys with Muscles**, and particularly **Roadkill** say it all. For more information, call Tsunami at (209) 683-8266.

PAST AND FUTURE

Merit Software (Dallas, TX) is all set to release **Kronolog: The Nazi Paradox** ($69.95). The setting is the year 2020, the Nazis are in control, and guess what — you have to save the world from disaster. Kronolog will feature a personal information manager (PIM), 3-D animation, and some 85 locations. Other scheduled Merit game titles include **Maelstrom** ($69.95), an intergalactic war game. For more information, call Merit at (800) 238-4277.

Kronolog: The Nazi Paradox

MAJORING IN ELECTRONIC ARTS

3 new titles from Electronic Arts (San Mateo, CA) let you perfect the art of management in somewhat different scenarios. EA's upcoming **Seal Team** ($59.95) combines tried-and-true flight-sim technology with a new ground-based PC war game.

You'll lead a team of Navy commandos on missions while viewing the polygon-fill action through their eyes — you'll just about smell the napalm in the morning.

In the futuristic **Syndicate** (price undetermined at press time), you're in command of a group of secret agents. The United States has been split up; your objective is to gain control of some 50 cities. The game will feature network support for up to eight simultaneous players.

Once again, in **Populous II: Trials of the Olympian** ($59.95) you're an immortal wannabe competing against 32 other Greek deities. Some 30 new godlike powers help you wreak havoc and keep your followers happy.

EA has announced its entry into the "edutainment" arena with five new titles.

Preschoolers can take a train to a mixed-up zoo and learn about letters, numbers, and colors in **Ping and Kooky's Cuckoo Zoo** ($49.95).

For 5- to 8-year-olds, there's EA's **Scooter's Magic Castle** ($49.95), featuring 25 games and activities to reinforce pattern recognition, memory, and matching.

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It's one thing to be shot down in the middle of a game, but without adequate memory you'll never get off the ground.

To get today's hottest computer games up and running, your computer needs increasingly vast amounts of conventional memory – the first 640K of memory found on nearly every PC compatible system. The same memory your mouse, CD-ROM and other peripherals compete for, as well.

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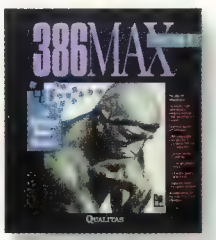

Best of all, it does it more easily and reliably than any other way. Just type "maximize" and 386MAX does the rest, automatically analyzing your system and configuring it for maximum memory and optimum performance. Which is why we call it The Intelligent Memory Manager. And why BYTE Magazine said "it's so easy to use and offers such significant benefits that it should be part of every system."

So, if you want to play today's most challenging games, but you don't want to run out of memory, run out and get 386MAX. Or call 1-800-676-0386 to order. At just $99.95, it's by far the best flight insurance money can buy.

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1991 BYTE AWARD OF MERIT

PC MAGAZINE EDITORS' CHOICE February 1 1990 386MAX Version 5.0

PC WORLD BEST BUY

© *1993 Qualitas.* Qualitas, 7101 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 1386, Bethesda, MD 20814. *All company and product names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners.* **System Requirements: Any 386, 386SX, 486 or 486SX PC or PS/2, min. 256K of extended memory, DOS 3.0 or higher, and hard disk drive. (386MAX also supports 286 machines with Shadow RAM, or any PC with EMS 4.0 hardware with 256K memory. Feature availability and memory recovery may vary on these systems.)**

Circle 92 on Reader Service Card.

For slightly older kids — 8 to 14 — there's **Eagle Eye Mysteries** ($49.95) with Jake and Jennifer Eagle, a logical detective game featuring 60 cases. (You can bet the butler didn't do it.)

Peter Pan: A Story Painting Adventure (price undetermined at press time) features animated paint tools for kids aged 6 to 10.

Starting a new MTV generation off on the right foot, **Video Jam** (price undetermined at press time) lets kids create their own animated music videos combining backgrounds, characters, and special effects with 100 songs. For more information on these products, call Electronic Arts at (415) 513-7555.

CASTLE TAKES CHESSMASTER

Just when you thought they couldn't do anything more with PC chess programs, two innovative new titles promise to deliver plenty of expert advice.

In Electronic Arts' **Kasparov's Gambit** (San Mateo, CA, $59.95), Gary Kasparov acts as your private instructor and evaluates your moves. He's also your ultimate opponent in what the company claims is the strongest chess engine ever.

The program features tutorials, ratings, and a 500-volume library of historic matches. For more information, call Electronic Arts at (415) 513-7555.

Chessmaster 3000 Pro ($99.95) is the updated version of the venerable Software Toolworks (Novato, CA) program. (Twenty years from now, will we be seeing Chessmaster 20,000 Deluxe Pro Gold Plus?)

This one includes four hours of audio instruction from former world champion Anatoly Karpov. For details, call Software Toolworks at (415) 883-3000.

GREEN ACRES

SimCity, SimEarth, SimAnt, SimLife — what's next? At Winter CES, Maxis (Orinda, CA) previewed its upcoming **SimFarm** ($59.95). You'll till the land and grow the crops that will make your acreage profitable according to the program's economic model. If you make the right moves, everything may come up roses — or wheat, or whatever.

New from AnimaTek, Maxis' Russian partner, is **El-Fish** ($59.95), in which you breed various species for desired genetic traits. Once you create the ultimate fish you place it in an electronic aquarium and watch it swim. Maxis says this one's from Russia with "glub."

Representing a departure from typical Maxis fare (although no one would consider Maxis fare "typical") is the new role-play adventure **Rome** ($49.95), developed with the British company FIRSTlight and featuring isometric and scrolling land graphics reminiscent of European imports such as Electronic Arts' PowerMonger. You begin the game as a poor slave aspiring to be emperor. How do you get to the top? When in Rome, do as the Romans do. For details, call Maxis at (510) 254-9700.

SOUNDS GOOD TO ME

Logitech (Fremont, CA) has long known how to create the right tactile feel for a mouse, and is now going after your auditory senses. The company's new **Soundman-16** card ($289) promises 16-bit stereo sound based on a Yamaha OPL-3 stereo synthesizer chip, a 4-watt-per-channel amplifier, SoundBlaster and AdLib compatibility, 20-voice MIDI support, a microphone jack, a library of sound and MIDI files, and accompanying software. Call Logitech at (800) 231-7717 for more information.

Become one with a world of your own creation in Virtual Reality Studio 2.0.

Creative Labs (Milpitas, CA) is introducing two new multimedia hardware packages.

The company's **Edutainment CD Upgrade Kit** will offer a CD-ROM drive, SoundBlaster Pro card, and speakers, bundled with eight CD-ROM titles ($699 internal drive, $799 external).

The **Discovery CD Upgrade Kit** will feature a CD-ROM drive, speakers, 8-bit SoundBlaster Pro card or Creative's new 16-bit SoundBlaster, plus Psygnosis' Lemmings and Software Toolworks' Multimedia Encyclopedia and The Animals on disc ($599 internal drive/8-bit sound, $699 external drive/8-bit sound or internal drive/16-bit sound, $799 external drive/16-bit sound). For more information, contact Creative Labs at (800) 998-LABS.

VIRTUALLY HERE

From across the big puddle, England's Domark Software (with offices in San Mateo, CA) has announced the release of **Virtual Reality Studio 2.0** ($99.95), an enhancement to the company's earlier 3-D world-creation program. Using basic cubes, spheres, and lines you design complex three-dimensional objects and then explore those worlds, going through and around the objects. Also new is **Harrier Assault** ($59.95), a flight sim based on the AV-8B "jump jet." The game will feature the plane's signature vertical takeoffs and landings. Call Domark at (408) 985-1700.

YES SIR-TECH

Sir-Tech Software (Ogdensburg, NY) has announced a new role-play game, **Realms of Arkania: Blade of Destiny** ($59.95), based on the German series Das Schwarze Auge. Characters will be endowed with the usual positive attributes, as well as negative ones such as greed, superstition, and a selection of phobias. Also in the works is **Ambush** (working title), a strategy game in which you manage a mercenary team protecting a medically significant tree. Call Sir-Tech at (800) 447-1230.

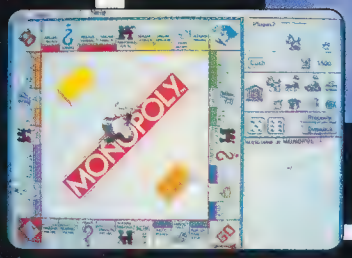
Realms of Arkania: Strength, goodness, greed, and fear combine to produce complex characters.

CORRECTIONS

The January 1993 issue contains errors about New World Computing's products. The PC version of Spaceward Ho! (p. 10) was designed and developed entirely by New World. Empire Deluxe (p. 10) is a new version of Empire. Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen (p. 48) is a stand-alone product you can interplay with Dark Side of Xeen.

Trade Up!

The Game You Grew Up With Has Grown Up Too!



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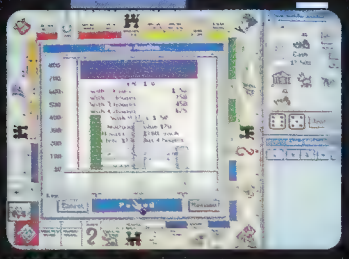

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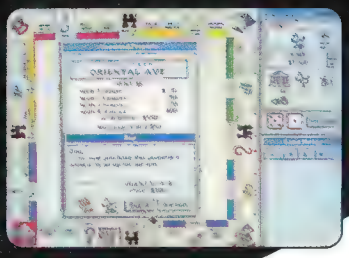

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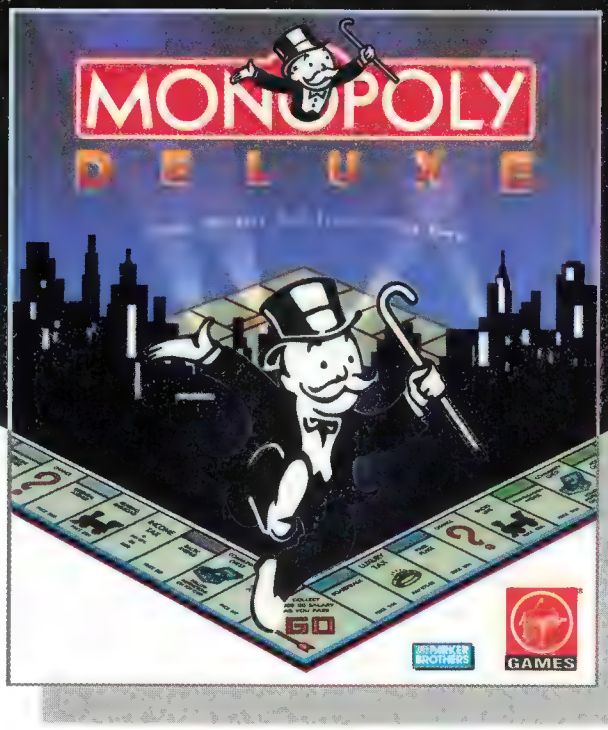

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Circle 64 on Reader Service Card.

By Bernie Yee

ALMIGHTY DOLLAR

In the battle between right-wing morality and liberal ideals, the name of the game is power — buying power.

Although the Oval Office is sporting a new occupant these days, you'd be right to wonder how politics finds its way into a column about games. But strangely enough, some of the right-wing fundamentalist groups who showed up at last summer's Republican National Convention affect the role-playing games you buy and play.

Not only do many of the extremists among them advocate censorship, they're also flexing their commercial muscles to influence game design and marketing strategies.

Even TSR's seminal fantasy role-playing game, *Dungeons & Dragons*, hasn't proved immune. The original rules refer to gods and demons, many of them Biblical, all occupying their proper positions in AD&D's polytheistic mythology. But today, references to gods and demons are nowhere to be found — not in AD&D itself, and not in SSI's AD&D computerized offerings. As in a revisionist history textbook, the rules have been expunged.

Bane, the villain from SSI's **Pools of Darkness**, is an evil, immortal, superhuman being who lives on another plane of existence, but nowhere is he called a demon or devil. TSR, in fact, expressly forbids it. Why? According to an industry source who spoke only on condition of anonymity, a group protested to one of the large chain stores that sells AD&D products, on the grounds that AD&D was encouraging Satanism and blasphemy. Rather than lose an important and profitable distributor, TSR rewrote its gaming universe to delete every reference to *god*, *devil*, or *demon*.

Ever wonder why playing a game like **Rex Nebular** results in something much less racy than the average TV sitcom? Enter Tandy Corporation, the Texas-based giant behind Radio Shack. The company's standards have influenced, directly or indirectly, games such as Rex Nebular and **Bane of the Cosmic Forge**. Where does Tandy get such clout? Any company, MicroProse and Sir-Tech among them, would be foolish to ignore the vast distribution network Radio Shack represents. And Tandy uses its position to enforce stringent standards of morality before it will distribute a game. In fact, *two* versions of Bane of the Cosmic Forge exist —

Ever wonder why playing a game like Rex Nebular, with its nasty/nice settings, results in something much less racy than the average TV sitcom?

one with incidental partial nudity, another without. The latter is solely for distribution by Tandy.

Tandy doesn't deny that it practices its own form of censorship, but, according to Ed Juge, a company spokesman, Tandy claims to be a family store, and its outlets won't carry any products Tandy feels are inappropriate for families.

Tandy's not alone. Paramount maintains strict control over its *Star Trek* license, with an emphasis on minimizing violence, something that led to the demise of a great game called **Star Fleet Battles**. Nintendo and Sega also exercise strict control over what goes on their consoles' cartridges.

Games aren't blameless, of course, or without offense. Witness titles such as **Les Manley**, **Leisure Suit Larry**, and **Spellcasting 101**; all represent adolescent male sexual fantasies. Males *do* make up the vast bulk of game buyers, but that's no excuse for portraying women as sex objects.

Computer games sometimes *do* manifest some of the worst aspects of beer-commercial mentality. Nonetheless, censorship is *not* the way to change that. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes described freedom of speech as a marketplace of ideas, where, in theory, the truth will emerge.

But it seems that the truth doesn't necessarily out where economic or political power comes into play. Most artists, including software designers, are too poor, too unorganized, or too apathetic to resist such *de facto* censorship. And we the buyers may not even be aware of all this before a game hits the shelves.

Gamers look for technological progress, exploration of new gaming concepts, and storytelling that push the limits of designers' imaginations. It seems we've got to ask questions about design censorship and distribution now, too.

Let's hope the new political atmosphere will support change, progress, exploration, and expression of new ideas — liberalism, even right here in our own little role-playing backyard. ❑

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By Cameron Crotty

BAILOUT

Our Top Gun columnist escapes to California at the speed of heat.

They said it couldn't be done, but here I am. Three weeks and 3000 miles later, I'm standing in San Francisco with a bottle of Anchor Steam in one hand and my joystick in the other, flying my PC toward a moon so yellow you could paint the Golden Gate with it and not know the difference.

Where was I? Oh yeah — *the speed of heat*. That's how long it takes for an infrared wave to travel from its origin to its destination. Since we're talking about electromagnetic radiation, that's about nothing flat — 186,000 miles per second. Real fast. That's not how fast I got to California, it's not how fast you're reading this, but it *is* how fast you broadcast your location to a hungry heat-seeking missile. It's also the imaginary ideal speed at which you exit a furball when things aren't going your way.

FEETS DON'T FAIL ME NOW

The delicate art of putting your tail between your legs and heading for the horizon isn't one that most fighter jocks dwell on for long. That's why they're still flying. To attain maximum performance, you must visualize the successful completion of your objectives. *See it, be it, do it.* Hey, it worked for the East German weight lifters.

Nevertheless, when you find yourself in an untenable position, it always helps to have some ready strategies for retreat. The best is simple — avoid it in the first place. The surest way to live another day is to decide to run away *before* you've engaged the bad guys. If you're low on fuel, low on ammo, far from home, outnumbered, or just don't feel right, vacate the area — you'll live longer. If you want proof, pay attention to your wingmen. Instead of cursing them when they bug out, pay attention to why they went and when. Following their example may not score you any extra kills, but it beats being dead.

MicroProse's Dogfight: Choose your craft, but watch your tail.

Believe it or not, it's also a great way to inject some realism into your flight simulation. If you're cruising home in your Spad with only a few rounds left and you see a flight of Fokkers, you're on them like white on rice. It's only a simulation, right?

In real time, with your life on the line, how many heroes are there? Raise your hands. No one? Thought so.

SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION

The cruel truth of nearly any fighter engagement is that if the situation is bad enough to make you think, "I'm in trouble," it's too late.

Oddly enough, World War II simulators seem to be the toughest to run away in once you've actually started a fight. The early **Red Baron**-style World War I aircraft are slow, take forever to gain altitude, and sport horribly inaccurate guns. Try a series of low yo-yos to gain some distance from an attacker, especially if your plane is more powerful. If you don't have the power, you're probably more maneuverable, so keep turning toward your attacker until he makes a pass too fast to recover from. Then turn and run. All you have to do is stay out of gun range until you land.

Denizens of the more-modern **Falcon 3.0**-style simulators sport heavy-duty long-range weaponry, with dogfights conducted at such fantastic distances and ridiculous speeds that exiting an unwanted confrontation isn't often much of a problem. (Just watch those Iraqi flyboys.)

Point your nose away from the bad guy (if he's not directly behind you), light your afterburners, drop a bunch of chaff and flares, and dive. Once you hit about 1000 knots, it should just be a matter of outdistancing your foe.

LAST ONE HOME BUYS DRINKS

Running like a scared rabbit may not be the sexiest tactic in the world, but if the choice is between turning tail and roasting in a quick fire, I'll take the former, drink to your bravery, and hope your chute doesn't fail.

By the way, I've moved. To California. Really. It doesn't much matter, because you still send mail to the same place, but I thought you'd like to know — just in case you want to buzz my new place. ❑

You get so much out of it because we put so much into it.

Falcon 3.0 Awards of Distinction

Computer Gaming World
Simulation of the Year 1992

PC Games
Best Flight Simulation of '92

PC Magazine
"A Best Product" of 1992

MultiMedia World
Readers Choice Award 1992

Consumer Electronics Show Innovations Award 1992

7 CompuServe Wilbur Awards

LOOK FOR FALCON 3.0 AIR COMBAT TRAINER
The latest Falcon 3.0 add-on
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We could tell you about the superb graphics we put into Falcon 3.0. And the incredibly real F-16 feel. And the sensational scope that delivers everything from Instant Action arcade excitement to plotting your own Red Flag training missions to engaging in a different campaign every time you play. But we couldn't say it half as well as the critics have said it. Look at the high marks they've given Falcon 3.0.

"The visuals during flight are awesome." JIM DOUGLAS, ACE

"If you aren't in the armed services–and maybe even if you are–this is as close as you can come to flying the Falcon."
PETER OLAFSON, COMPUTE

"The graphics are stunning, the sound is incredible and the game play is a rush."
DAVID ETHEL, VIDEO GAMES & COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

"Be excited. Falcon 3.0 makes other efforts in this genre seem like test runs for the real thing."
STRATEGY PLUS EDITORS

"The most complete and accurate jet fighter simulation to be found this side of a security clearance. Period."
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"The most appealing aspect is the realism. This is as true to life as I've seen on a computer."
COMPUTER GAME REVIEW EDITORS

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Circle 122 on Reader Service Card.

By Gregg Keizer

WHO'S THE BOSS?

If your kids' school can't do it, you'd better.

I walk by the computers in my daughter's elementary school and shudder. Not only are there just a handful of machines for more than 100 first- and second-graders, but those systems were obsolete long before Ronald Reagan left the White House.

Apple IIcs — portable versions of the venerable Apple IIe — and even older Commodore PETs are crowded into a tiny, closet-like room. Some of these computers — the Commodore PETs — are so old they predate *floppy*-disk drives. To run a program on one of the Commodores, kids load an audio tape into something that looks like a cassette deck.

It's a sad fact, but almost any home with a PC has more raw computing power than all but the most luxuriously equipped classroom.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BAKE SALES?

It used to be that parents pushed so hard for computers in the classroom that PTAs across the land organized bake sales and car washes to raise the money. You don't hear those stories anymore. Maybe it's because those parents wised up, took that money, and bought their *own* home computers.

It seems that if you want your children to have any time at all with a computer, if you want them to learn on the PC, or just want the tool available to them, you've got to have one at home. Kids sure won't get much keyboard time at school.

No wonder, then, that home-learning-software sales are climbing right through the roof. Technologically savvy parents *and* those who don't know the difference between a DMA and the DAR have gone out and bought PCs, then equipped them with software from companies such as Davidson, The Learning Company, Broderbund, Edmark, and MECC. But if that's the choice — computer time at home or none at all, and I'm convinced that's the choice for most American parents — then you need to create a computer learning center in your house. Not just a PC and a pile of software, but an integrated, enticing environment for your children.

It's tough to decide on the right place for the home PC, particularly if *you* use the machine for work, but resist the temptation to stick the PC away in that back bedroom you use as an office. Nothing associates work and the PC faster than secluding the machine like some sort of shrine to Mom's and Dad's careers.

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

So bring the PC out into the open, and put it in a part of the house where everyone congregates. The rec room and den are good bets. (This may sound counterproductive, but one of the best spots for the home-learning center is in the same room as the family TV.) If possible, put the PC on a desk in a corner of the room, add a lamp to the desktop, then surround the desk with low bookcases to hold software, references, and supplies. By defining the space physically with walls, bookcases, and separate lighting, you'll create a much more inviting learning center.

All by itself, the PC works wonders. But add a couple of affordable peripherals, and it becomes a much more effective learning tool. First, if you don't already have a mouse — maybe you're still using DOS productivity programs and don't think you need one — buy one for the kids. Most kids' programs use a mouse; many require it.

If the PC doesn't already have some sort of audio ability, add a sound board to the computer. You can pick up a low-end sound card — Creative Labs' **SoundBlaster** or MediaVision's **ThunderBoard**, for example — for $100 or less. Purchase a pair of inexpensive speakers for the PC, too. Places like Office Depot and Bizmart sell speakers for as little as $40 a pair. If the TV's in the room, try a pair of Walkman-style headphones instead.

Finally, start saving for a color printer. No, you don't have to go out and buy one right now, but when you decide to replace that old dot-matrix, see whether you can fit a color model into the budget. A color ink-jet printer — the **HP DeskJet 500C** is an excellent choice — will help your kids' wonderful computer artwork migrate from PC to paper.

A home learning center brings kids and today's technology together at the the child's convenience, not the computer's. That's something schools may *never* be able to do. ❑

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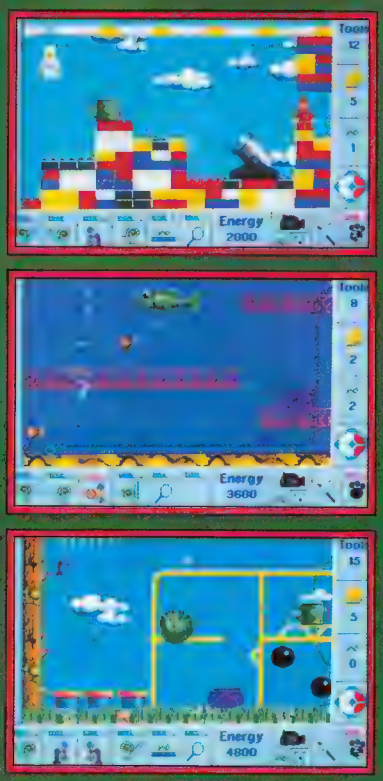

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PCG REVIEWS

APRIL/MAY REVIEWS

18 Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds
The long-awaited RPG sequel arrives. 9

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Check out this title before it hits the shelves.

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A huge strategic war game for WW II buffs and committed players. 7

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An edutainment program for strategists aged 12 and up. 7

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A fun and instructional golf sim. 7

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A galactic challenge with a Western twist. 7

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A WWII sim that captures the challenge of naval command. 7

30 LEGENDS OF VALOUR
A fantasy RPG that nevertheless leaves you flat. 6

34 DUNE II
A compelling and exciting strategy game, based on the book. 8

36 ATAC: THE SECRET WAR AGAINST DRUGS
A war-game/flight-sim hybrid. 6

38 CONQUERED KINGDOMS
A solid fantasy/strategy war game. 6

72 SHADOWLANDS
A dingy strategy/action game. 3

73 THE MAGIC CANDLE III
The next in a series of fantasy RPGs. 6

74 MILLIE'S MATH HOUSE
An edutainment package featuring a talking cow. 8

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Games are rated (1 poor-10 great) on the basis of graphics and sound quality, playability, and ease of installation within their genres. Scores are listed at the end of each review and are recapped below, following descriptions.

Trinx
Eloemosynator
Funktion kode "Guardian" iz uzed to refer to ekztremely denze information pattern which iz lokal ekztenzion of ekztra-dimensional conglomeraz.
Without proper konstraintz upon data, zearch time rizez ekzponenzially. One muzt uze linitz that kalley an achievable objektive, but one that still hez value. And yet, thoze linitz themzelvez are data which one muzt zeek, leading to potenzial infinite regrezz
1. Who can help me find what I seek?
2. Are you just trying to confuse me?
3. Goodbye.

Ultima Underworld II is the most dazzling role-playing environment around.

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD II: LABYRINTH OF WORLDS

By Pamela and Bernie Yee

You'd think they'd have at least thrown a party to celebrate. But no. Origin unleashed Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds — the sequel to its most successful product of 1992, Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss — with an uncharacteristic lack of fanfare. But the absence of trumpets can't disguise the fact that this is one terrific role-playing game.

Although Underworld II retains its ancestor's engine, no one else has yet caught up with Looking Glass (the designers of Underworld). That makes Underworld II the *de facto* state-of-the-art game in the category of first-person perspective, scrolling 3-D viewpoint role-playing. Underworld II reminds us that the competition is still a few rungs down the evolutionary ladder.

The graphics and animation are better; Underworld II uses digitized bit maps for its wall images, something that gives the game a greater sense of reality and variety. The game's designers have also improved the monster images dramatically (resolution has increased by 250 percent) and upped the animation frame rate as well. The result is that images look and move more realistically, even up close and personal.

Of course, the game's smooth, true 3-D scrolling means you can run, jump, swim, and look up, down, and around; you can choose the detail setting to match your machine's processor speed. Other game-system enhancements include slippery ice caverns and water currents, digitized sound effects, and, with appropriate hardware, stereo effects. Doors creak, water splashes, and swords clang in a way that really adds to the game's atmosphere. Several key speeches are even digitized. If you recognize the voice, it's because you've heard it before; it's the Guardian from Ultima VII: The Black Gate.

The plot also is stronger than Underworld I's, because II takes place one year after the defeat of the Guardian in Ultima VII. Your old friends are gathered in Lord British's domicile to celebrate the victory when the castle is covered by a mysterious blackrock gem. The Guardian's message is clear: Swear loyalty to him or starve while he wages war on the rest of Britannia. As the game progresses, you'll see your friends first grow irritable, then panicky, as supplies dwindle and murderers run rampant.

To defeat the Guardian yet again, you must find a way out of the prison, a process that takes you all the way to the basement, from which the black gem, an aftereffect of the Guardian's spell, can transport you mystically to

alternate realities also under siege by the red-faced evil one.

The clues to victory lie in the various realities, each plane keyed into a different facet of the Guardian's gem. Interaction is vital here; others in the castle and in alternate realities will aid you by giving you information and advice. But all the same, this is a solo affair — no one will journey with you. Conversations (menu driven as in Underworld I), are now more context sensitive and flow more realistically.

Underworld II sports the point-and-click, drag-and-drop interface from The Stygian Abyss, so veterans should have little or no trouble picking up the controls. Unlike some 3-D wannabe role-playing games, Underworld lets you reach "into" its universe to manipulate objects with your mouse. The command icons remain unchanged and are self-explanatory. The display window is bigger, so you can see more scenery at once. Game speed is still an issue, even on a 486/33 machine, because of frequent disk accesses; a disk cache is recommended. And Underworld still has the best automapping system around, letting you take notes right on the map.

Combat takes place in real time. Clicking on the rune bag accesses the contents, which you can order into an appropriate spell. Because spell-casting takes place in real time, too, combat continues while you rummage around for the rune to complete your *Heal* spell. If you're smart, you'll prepare a spell in advance.

Although the game still keeps you in the dark, dank dungeon (let us out!) and still doesn't let you import previous Avatars, Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds is clearly the most graphically dazzling role-playing environment around.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10

Origin Systems, P.O. Box 161750, Austin, TX 78716, (800) 999-4939; IBM PC or compatible, 386 or faster, 2MB RAM; VGA; requires hard-disk drive, disk cache and mouse recommended; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, SoundBlaster; $79.95

SNEAK PEEKS

Keeping one eye on the horizon — and both hands on the joystick.

CAESAR

By David Sears

With Augustus in power, the provinces are up for grabs. The rural outbacks need taming, the people deserve a taxing, and there's wine to ferment. Thanks to Impressions' Caesar, anyone can build, and burn, Rome in a lot less than a day.

THE ETERNAL (SIM)CITY

Before you turn your chariot toward the Eternal City, though, you'll have to build a string of cities to prove your worth. Break ground carefully. Too far from water and the cost of aqueducts will kill you; build too quickly and you'll have to borrow money from the Empire to complete your first year as magistrate.

As you make civilization, so must you make military might. You must raise an army of professional soldiers, irregulars, or slaves.

Caesar demands a sharp sword as much as he delights in a sharp mind. After all, roving barbarians storm the gates all too often.

Comparisons with SimCity are inevitable. Caesar's city mechanics seem to work in much the same way as the classic urban simulator's. Plazas bear the same heavy traffic of Sim-jammed roadways; high-priced land means high-priced housing and higher taxes; slaves extinguish flames like modern fire departments; and industrial areas have a bad tendency to go up in smoke.

The two games differ most noticeably in architecture, however, and Caesar beats SimCity — with or without the latter's expansion sets — hands down. Baths, always popular with the citizenry, tend to outgrow their assigned lots and take over surrounding land and buildings.

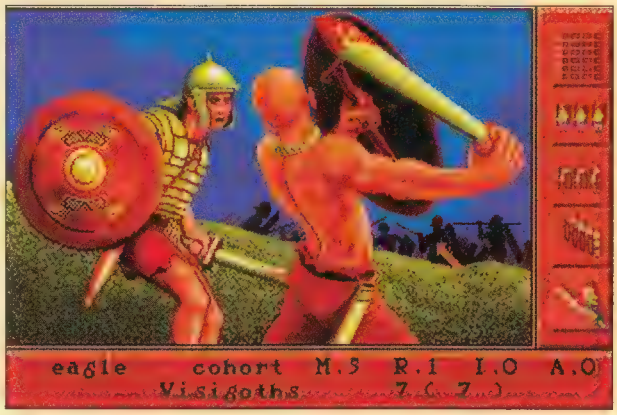
Temples swell with adulating throngs and absorb nearby shrines for the greater glory of their deities. Private residences ease into palatial splendor, towering over the Forum and the markets. The overhead view of a typical city in Caesar looks quite authentic.

ET TU, COHORT?

Of course, we don't know exactly how a Roman town worked. But even though each element you include in your model functions only on conjecture, its seems like well-researched conjecture. If we can't know just how Rome really worked, this is how it ought to have operated.

At its root, though, Caesar's a game of acquisition and politics, not architecture. As you build roads from the capital to distant villages, you increase trade and thus your approval rating with Rome. Secure enough provinces and you too can become ruler of the Empire.

Caesar also trots past SimCity in the violence department. This simulation can connect with Impressions' Cohort 2 game for some man-to-man combat, each soldier fully animated. Without the link, you'll still have several battle formations from which to choose and three admittedly lackluster power bars to weigh the strength of your opponents.



The soldier-to-soldier combat in Caesar is fully animated.

DON'T FIDDLE WHILE ROME BURNS

If running a fledgling province overwhelms your management skills, head to the Forum and consult your advisers — they'll provide details on your army, slaves, taxes, and industry. You might glean a few hints on managing a rioting populace or those nasty invading barbarians.

All actions route through the menu bar at the bottom of the screen. You use the mouse to choose among works, but viewing your handiwork on screen at any one time can become a bottleneck in your colonizing efforts.

More entertaining than a day at the hippodrome, Caesar unites lush urbanization with a modicum of fierce but easy-does-it fighting for one highly playable quest: Rule everything. Nothing less would suit one such as you, born for greatness in the Empire.

Impressions Software, 7 Melrose Drive, Farmington, CT 06032, (203) 676-0127; requirements not set at press time; $59.95

PACIFIC WAR

By Ed Ferrell

Sometimes the PC is an amazing hunk of iron. For instance, it can swallow the biggest, brawniest board game without a flicker of indigestion. It's no longer an unwieldy giant — no more sweating over thousands of cardboard pieces, no more anxious moments when the family dog waltzes through the living room and brushes up against the table.

Unlike their paper ancestors, strategic war games on the PC provide almost immediate combat results — no more hours spent peering at tiny tables buried deep in the documentation. In many ways, computers have rescued grand-scale board games.

Gary Grigsby and Strategic Simulations took excellent advantage of the PC's bookkeeping skills when they created Pacific War, a game almost as big as the ocean it's named after. This is a gargantuan program, definitely for the committed gamer.

FROM L.A. TO THE LAND OF THE RISING RUN

You take command of all land, sea, and air units in the Pacific theater of World War II, then issue orders to battalions, divisions, and even individual ships. As its name implies, this game spans the vast distances between the Arctic and the Aussies, Los Angles and Tokyo Bay. Over 78 million square miles of ocean and land make up your board.

Pacific War provides several short scenarios, but they're not what this big game is all about. *Campaign 41* starts with the infamous December 7th Japanese bombing run, for instance, and continues until the end of the war. It's the only way to feel the full impact of this game. As the box suggests, Pacific War can take anywhere from ten to 100 hours to complete. The only way you'll finish in less than ten hours is by surrendering before a shot's fired.

This game has everything, and I mean *everything*. Your duties include, but aren't limited to, anything Nimitz or Yamamoto faced. You create task forces and assign leaders, and order amphibious landings and air strikes — you alone deploy your nation's strategic assets. Mundane tasks such as refueling, resupplying, and refitting also are yours, as are jobs such as expanding bases and monitoring the industrial expansion of friendly factories.

Pacific War preserves SSI's well-deserved reputation for detail and historical accuracy. Large-scale map views display task forces and bases in a way that may remind you of those tiny cardboard pieces. When creating task forces or taking damage, the game even supplies actual pictures of the ships. Animation is limited to a few fires on board, but it's still a nice touch in this strategic war game.

You issue orders for troop movement via a pattern that cycles through all your land forces: You tell them to hold, move out, or find resupply. You can send your air units on search missions, to clear an area for your task forces, or flying deep into enemy territory for pre-invasion raids.

Menus of ships in port help you create task forces, the central focus of this game. Creating the proper task force shapes your assault and tailors your fleet to your plan of attack. Heavy firepower isn't always as important as speed and agility. And don't forget oilers and tankers, or you'll limit the range of your fleet. If you're escorting transports, be sure you have enough defensive prowess to protect our boys.

The manual contains more than 50 pages on military equipment and is yet another indication of Pacific War's attention to detail. Historically accurate time lines don't list any ship or aircraft type until it was actually available.

WHEN IS BIG TOO BIG?

It takes major planning to coordinate all your forces and execute a battle plan. More than battle plans are tested in Pacific War, though, for part of your job as supreme commander is contending with the minutiae of repairs, replacements, and reinforcements. It may sound humdrum, but such logistical matters take on immense importance when you're playing out the entire war.

Pacific War's maps are both detailed and historically accurate.

Is Pacific War too big? Not if you dream of commanding fleets, not just a frigate. If you're a rookie commander in chief, though, start with another title.

But if you can't pass up the opportunity to fill the shoes of men like Nimitz and Yamamoto, glue yourself to Pacific War. It may not be the real thing — thank goodness — but it's the closest anyone younger than George Bush can get.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

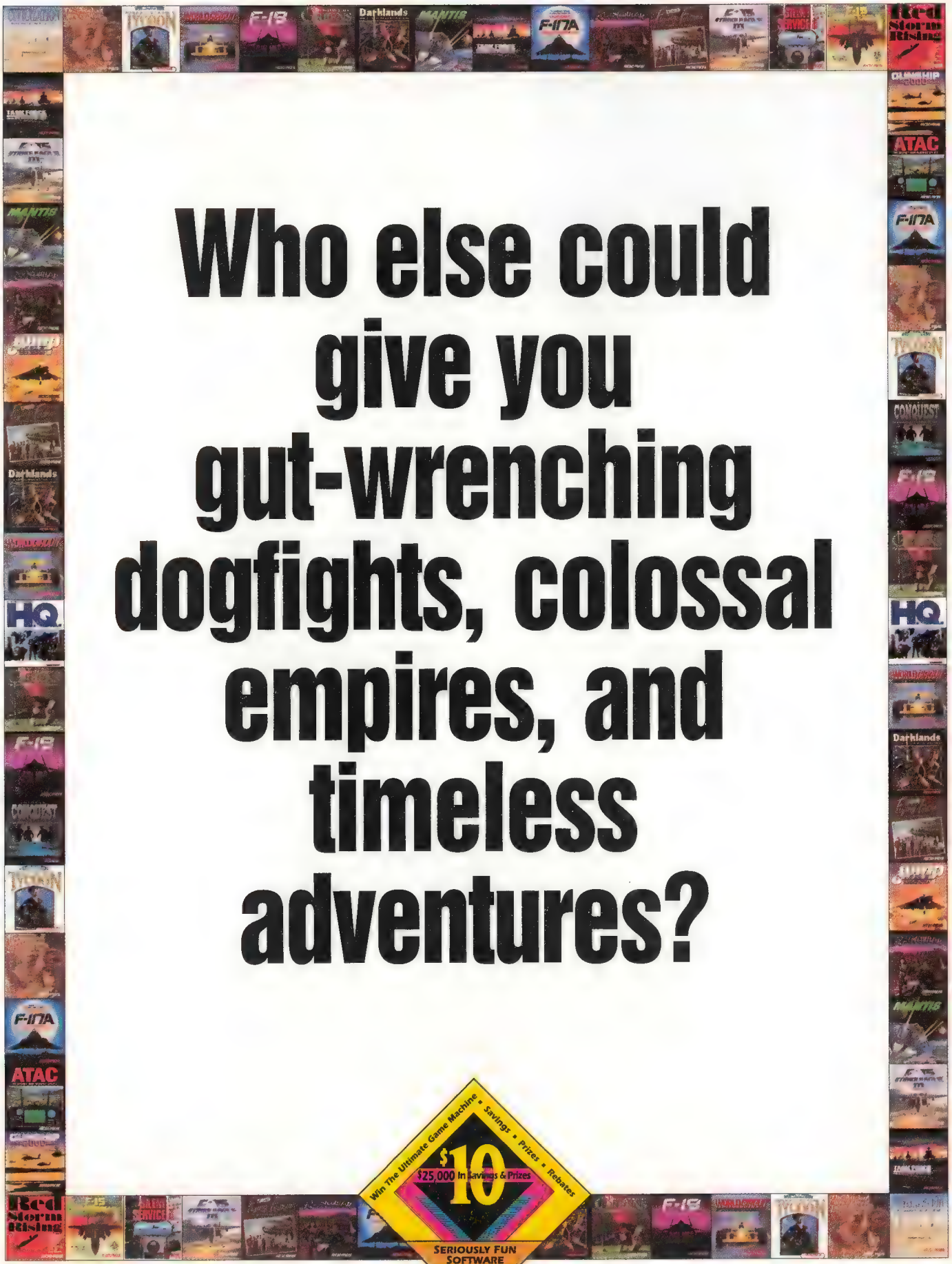
Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Avenue, Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible, 640K RAM; EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster; mouse recommended; $79.95

ISLAND OF DR. BRAIN

By Cynthia E. Field

Let's show some respect. If your parents named *you* Thaddeus Egghead Brain, you wouldn't know how to dress, either. Like Dr. Brain, you'd probably wear a smiley-face badge on your lab coat, cultivate a bizarre fascination with flamingos, and grow oversized Chia pets in the front yard.

If you've already signed on as a lab assistant in the Castle of Dr. Brain, the first saga in Sierra's Discovery Series,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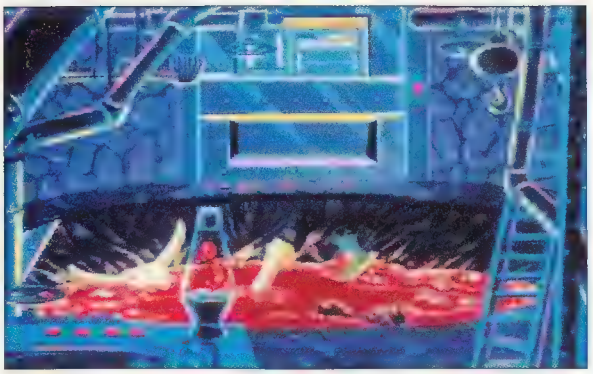

Dr. Brain: colorful edutainment for young strategists.

you've already experienced some of the old fellow's wacky what's-its. On the Island of Dr. Brain, you get to savor T.E.B.'s latest collection of puzzles, sight gags, sick puns, and ageless musings. As Dr. Brain himself would say, "When the going gets tough, the tough use their Hint Watch."

And speak he does — if you have the appropriate sound card or device. (I enjoyed Dr. Brain's witticisms on a Disney Sound Source.) A CD-ROM edition of the game is in the works. Among other things, the compact-disc version is expected to feature talking busts of the famous artists who populate Dr. Brain's art gallery. In the floppy-disk version, likenesses of Salvador Dali and Georgia O'Keeffe lip-synch to words that appear in pop-up dialog boxes. But I'm getting "a head" of myself.

A FASCINATING GETAWAY FOR THE RENAISSANCE KID

In this colorful goose chase for strategists aged 12 and up, Island of Dr. Brain dispatches you to his personal Shangri-La, a floating PC game preserve located somewhere in the Cerebral Hemisphere. Your goal is to search for a special battery — without it, Dr. Brain's latest invention is a dud.

Parents and teachers can take solace in the fact that retrieving Dr. Brain's battery also energizes both sides of the player's cerebrum as he or she explores a whole-brain assortment of challenging activities. You'll find everything from logic puzzles and chemical analyses to foreign-language word searches and programming robots — all played to the rhythm of an original stereo soundtrack. In short, Dr. Brain's island is a certainly a fascinating getaway for the Renaissance kid.

MENTAL AEROBICS FOR ALL LEVELS

You can play the game on three levels: novice, standard, and expert. But unlike games that pigeonhole you for the duration, Island of Dr. Brain lets you set the challenge level higher or lower for each individual activity.

If you're especially good at French, *par example*, you might want to raise the bar and take on a more serpentine word search. In contrast with that capability, you can decrease the difficulty level if a puzzle is beyond your ken. During a particularly "drain-bread" Tower of Hanoi interlude, for example, I had to switch from a seven-disk expert-level puzzle to the more-manageable five-disk version. Sure, I could have persevered at the higher level for another day or two. But I was impatient to escape from the underground cave and try my skill at the animated jigsaw puzzle, the cipher bridge, and the antonym anthill.

Thad's one-size-fits-all reference book, the *EncycloAlmanacTionaryOgraphy* (a combination encyclopedia, almanac, dictionary, and bibliography) can extract you from sticky spots. This 100-page paperback includes a description of the logic gates you'll use in the circuit programmer puzzle, for instance. Another section of the handbook explains how mathematical functions are graphed. (You need to become familiar with simple, linear, and polynomial functions to use Dr. Brain's microorganism-sorting microscope.)

The *EncycloAlmanacTionaryOgraphy* also doubles as off-disk copy protection. The ensuing navigation puzzle may be fun the first couple of times you try it, but it quickly becomes a pain in the thalamus.

Although some puzzles test your ability to use and manipulate language, most of the challenges in Island of Dr. Brain incorporate scientific or mathematical principles directly or indirectly. By the time you finish your first game, you'll have a better conception of counterweights, chemical density, spatial relationships, and even musical pitch.

GEARING UP

Nerdy he may be, but Dr. Brain's still a fair-minded guy. The tougher the challenge, the greater the number of points he adds to your score. Depending on the level you choose, Dr. Brain awards you a bronze, silver, or gold trophy and logs your winnings on an *Achievement Board*, which you can review whenever you like. Reaching the maximum possible score of 1000 points (and obtaining Dr. Brain's shhhh . . . ecret document) means replaying all puzzles several times at each level. Games are random, so it's unlikely you'll encounter the same challenge twice.

Island of Dr. Brain is money well spent. It exposes kids (and adults) to a host of challenges in math, science, language, and the arts. You set your own achievement level, you learn new things, and, best of all, you laugh a lot.

In fact, Sierra is so confident about Island of Dr. Brain's "edutainment" value that the company will refund your money if the program fails to deliver. Now if only school worked that way.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible, 286 or faster, 640K RAM; EGA, VGA; requires hard-disk drive; mouse recommended; supports AdLib, IBM PS/1 Audio, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland MT-32, MT-100, LAP C-1, CM326, CM-64, SoundBlaster, Sound Source, ThunderBoard, Tandy sound; $49.95

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GREENS

By Jim Bail

The snow's almost gone and spring's just around the corner. So what have you done to get ready for the links? Washed your clubs? Bought a three-pack of new balls?

MicroProse's Greens is just what the pro ordered. This instructional golf game not only has a thing or two to teach you, but provides plenty of fun as you count down the days until you can really hit the tee.

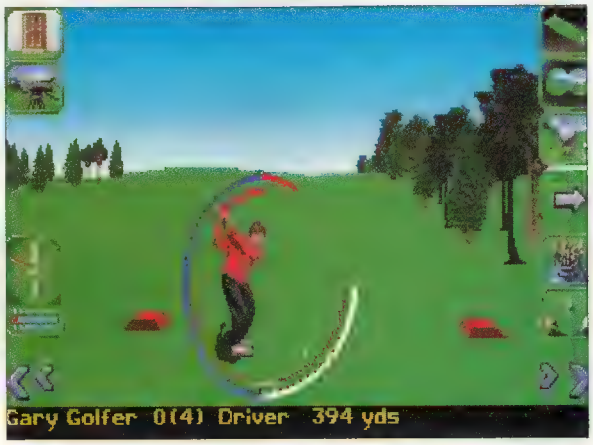
HOW SWEET IT IS

Greens serves up a challenging round of golf — so challenging, in fact, that the game's handicap feature is well served as you work your way toward scratch status. In real golf, the handicap system was invented to even players, and make a match more competitive and exciting. In Greens, the handicap works the same way it does in real life, and makes the inevitable learning period much less frustrating, especially if you're out for blood right away.

Greens' graphics images aren't as detailed as those in Access' Links, but they're more than passable. Fairways show a grain, the greens are inviting, and obstacles present themselves in a believable way. Besides, the game is absorbing, and the graphics images — or lack thereof — become less important as you concentrate on your next shot. The trade-off between the lack of total course detail and quick screen redraws is more than worth it to those of us who want to shoot birdies, not pictures.

The interface is accessible and solid. Almost every option you need is on the shot screen and only a click away. From there you can set tee height, position yourself within the blocks, adjust your stance, and, most importantly, see both the hole from above and the expected flight path of the ball with the selected club. With a click on the binoculars icon, you're carried along the line of your shot for a closer inspection of the landing area and the green. Each course is packed with trouble, and you'd better plot each shot as carefully as possible.

The swing bar is wrapped around the golfer and travels accurately along the arc of the club face. There are no landmarks on the meter, save for the maximum-power hash at the top of the stroke. You have to develop a feel, and once you do, play is consistent and solid. You swing by the two-click method: Click once to initiate the swing, release when you reach your desired power, then finish the stroke with the final click in the sweet spot. For an intentional hook, click before the sweet spot; for a fade, click after. Of course, the farther away from the sweet spot you click, the more you hook or slice.



Greens: simple graphics, but fast screen redraw.

Greens' most unique swing feature is its variable sweet spot; its size differs depending on club selection and the amount of power in the swing. That makes sense. After all, higher irons are much more forgiving than low irons and woods. Sometimes — especially when hitting from a slope or a bunker without adjusting your stance — you'll be surprised at how the sweet spot has shifted to reflect your error in judgment.

Greens pays special attention to your footwork. Stance is critical to a

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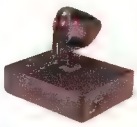

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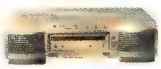

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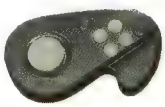

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good hit. Ball placement forward and aft in the stance brings with it all kinds of possibilities for creative shot making. When you want more than the usual amount of backspin on the ball — to keep the ball on the front edge of a green, for instance — you can simply move the ball back in your stance. This maneuver makes the ball travel on a lower trajectory. Because the club face still has some downward momentum when it strikes the ball, you'll get more backspin.

PUTTING IT IN THE HOLE

Too bad MicroProse didn't put as much effort into Greens' putting. Although the putting engine is consistent and lining up the putt is realistic, things fall apart when you shoot, then step back to watch the ball in a close-up window.

This window, which covers six square feet of the green, is supposed to give you the detail of the ball as it nears the cup, but I found it inaccurate. There's nothing more frustrating than sizing up a 49-footer, striking just right, watching the ball roll into the close-up window, seeing it come to rest right on top of the hole, but then, after the celebration, discovering that you're eight inches away from the hole.

As good as Greens is, this flaw detracts from the virtual experience. (Note, though, that this is as much a cosmetic flaw as anything, because if you hit the ball right, you won't be cheated.)

LEARN FROM A MASTER

As challenging as the courses are, there are times when you lust for more than just a round of stroke play. Greens lets you play in a variety of matches, including *Skins*, *Threeball*, *Fourball*, and *Tournament*. In many computer golf simulations, it's tough to play with others, if only because of the time it takes for the screen to redraw after each player's shot. Not so with Greens, which redraws the screen faster than any other golf simulation I've seen.

Perhaps one of the best parts of this package is its manual. With David Leadbetter's help, the documentation is a nice hybrid of game instruction and pure golf instruction. It covers almost every facet of the game; you'll be amazed at how much of the advice you can apply immediately to Greens. There's even a section on positive thinking and imagery.

If you're into golf, either on the links or in front of the monitor, pick up Greens. The game play is solid, challenging, and to the point. Play it long enough, and you may learn enough to shave some strokes off your real game — if you can tear yourself away from your computer.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

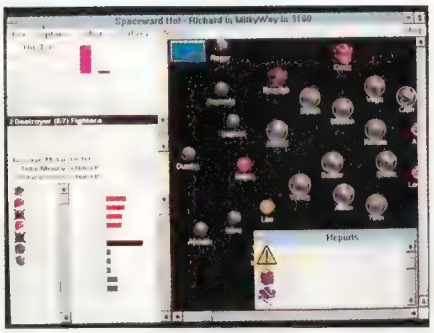
MicroProse Software, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (800) 879-7529, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible, 2MB RAM, DOS 5.0 or later; VGA, MCGA; mouse recommended; supports AdLib, Roland; $59.95

SPACEWARD HO!

By Brad Dixon

One small mouse click for man, one giant conquered planet for mankind. Galactic conquest is the name of the game in New World Computing's graphics strategy game Spaceward Ho! Following a spin-off premise — American exploration and expansion into the heart of North America — you build spaceships, move from planet to planet, and set up colonies. When you meet the bad guys, you'll head for the galactic version of a dusty street for a shoot-out.

Spaceward Ho! makes good use of its "Go West, young man" theme. Whether you get a rousing *Hyahh* from your SoundBlaster-supported speakers as you head for another planet or a knee-slappin' *Shucks* when you've lost one in battle, this strategy game balances success, adventure, planning, profit, and danger as well as any simulation of our own cross-country expeditions of the 1800s. For the hours of fun



Spaceward Ho! has a hokey Western motif, but it's a blast to play.

it provides, give Spaceward Ho! a hearty *Yeee-haaaa*!

T MINUS 10 AT THE TRAILHEAD

For all the hours of fun Spaceward Ho! provides, it's remarkably friendly to both hard-disk drive and RAM. The game requires only 3.5 megabytes of hard-disk drive space and 640K of RAM to run in black-and-white or 16-color graphics mode. To get the most out of Spaceward Ho!, though, you'll want to run it in 256-color graphics, which may require as much as 384K of extended or expanded memory. The Windows version I tested sets up its own applications group and program icon in the Program Manager; from there, getting to the game is as simple as a double-click of the mouse button.

Choices abound for savvy players in Spaceward Ho! You assign levels of expertise to both yourself and your computer opponents, choose the shape of the galaxy you want to conquer, name its size, and decide on its star density. All these decisions affect how easily you colonize the galaxy and how often you bump into your alien enemies.

Once you set the stage, the screen shows the main window, where you get a view of the section of the galaxy that surrounds your home planet and information about the planet you're on and others you've colonized, and a window with bar charts showing how you're spending your money on technology development. This is where all the action takes place. It's where you decide the fate of your expansion from planet to planet and

Slow Screen Redraw Needn't Be Par For The Course...

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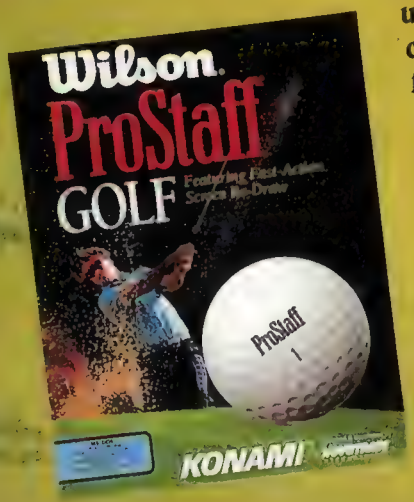
O.K., since you asked, we should also mention the wide variety of side-game options — things like Shoot Out, Stroke Play, Match Play and Best Ball. You get eight options in individual play, a whopping 13 in team play... simply pick and choose to create your own personal playing style.

Wilson® ProStaff® Golf is an ideal game for golfers of all levels, from beginner to expert. Making a shot is quick and easy — just select a club and adjust your stance, take aim, then choose your power level and ball spin and watch it fly! An undulating grid shows every curve and contour of the fairways and greens, for greater accuracy as you plan your shot. Finally, one game brings it all together to give golfers what they've been looking for — a challenging course, intuitive controls and realistic game play. So don't get teed off at the competition, go with a real winner... *Wilson ProStaff Golf.*



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7TH HOLE

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manage those two vital resources, metal and money.

HEAD 'EM UP, MOVE 'EM OUT

Your home planet is a comfortable place, fully terraformed, with a perfect climate and lots of metal ready to turn into ships. You also start with a scout ship and a colony ship, so you can begin star travel immediately. A better tack, though, is to build your fleet, planetary defenses, and some technological expertise before heading for the stars.

You control all this ship building and spend all this money (for developing weapons, shields, speed, range, and miniaturization technologies) by manipulating the bar charts in the main-window screen. If you want to dig for more metal, for example, increase the height of the bar that controls mining. If terraforming's important, raise the height of the corresponding bar. To build the scouts, fighters, and colony vessels that will carry you farther from home, just raise the height of the ship's bar. Don't expect to see little people riveting ships or worlds changing as they're terraformed, though — Spaceward Ho! doesn't offer much in the form of animation.

KEEP YOUR FOCUS

Still, shipbuilding is one of the game's most intriguing and involved activities. You can construct a fleet on any colonized planet with metal. Three classes of ships — scouts, fighters, and colony vessels — carry default range, speed, shields, and weapons characteristics, or you can customize them. You also can name new fleets and give them unique graphics so that you can identify them on the battle screens.

Because it's easy to get caught up in shipbuilding, you'll need to remind yourself that technological R&D is vital, too. You're going to tangle with the enemy eventually, and you'd better be ready — after all, the opposition forces will be ready to give you their best shot. Higher technology ratings for your ships are the best way to ensure victory when taking on the galactic bad guys.

When it's time to get your fleet moving, just click on the planet it's resting on and drag it to a destination world; a white arrow indicates a properly planned move. Once your fleet arrives, the game offers information about the planet's environment, the amount of metal available, and the presence of any enemy. After you've checked out a planet, send a colony ship to bring in the people necessary to terraform and mine it.

When you meet the enemy, Spaceward Ho! takes over. Don't look for arcade sequences in this game — just sit back and watch as the opposing forces face off, fighting it out on a battle screen that features shots raining down from each ship and explosions ripping the vanquished. These battle screens hog what little animation and significant hi-res graphics you'll find in this game.

ROUND UP EVERY DOGIE

Winning Spaceward Ho! is almost anticlimactic — the game is that good. Like a great flick, Spaceward Ho! keeps you entranced in a cycle of action: supporting colonies, mining marginal planets, building fleets, and thwarting aliens. When you finally own all the planets, it's a letdown.

As strategy games go, Spaceward Ho! is first-rate. It's a winner, whether you want to play for an hour or for days at a time. (You can, of course, save your conquest in progress.) Give Spaceward Ho! — hokey Western motif and all — two thumbs up for providing a fascinating strategic challenge in a format that excites the imagination.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

New World Computing, P.O. Box 4302, Hollywood, CA 90078, (818) 999-0606; IBM PC or compatible, 16MHz or faster, Windows version requires Windows 3.0 or later; Hercules monochrome, EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster; $53.95

TASK FORCE 1942

By Ed Ferrell

Fifty-one years ago, the Japanese were concentrating on cannons, not cars, on torpedoes, not TVs, and on fire control, not financial control. After the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese Navy seemed poised to sail to Australia. But less than a year later, the Allies made a stand in the waters around Guadalcanal.

You can play a part in these pivotal events with MicroProse's Task Force 1942, a simulation that captures the challenge of naval command during wartime. To emerge victorious you'll need both strategic skill and arcade ability. As supreme commander, you control task groups, divisions, and individual ships in eight historical Solomon Islands scenarios or in a full Guadalcanal campaign. You're going to be busy.

NO SMART WEAPONS HERE

You can take the helm of any ship to control speed, course, and gun turrets, or command the entire task force and issue fleet orders to maneuver in formation and attack in force. You may even have to direct an individual ship's damage-control party to keep a ship from sinking.

Even though Task Force 1942 is a multistation game — much like other MicroProse titles, including B-17 Flying Fortress — you can't be everywhere at once. Any station you're not manning returns automatically to computer control. But when the action gets heavy, you'll need to take over: Although adequate, the computer plays conservatively, and if you want something done right, you'd better do it yourself.

The documentation's vintage photographs give you an idea of how realistic this game's graphics images are. The center bridge comes complete with forward-looking windows, a charts table, an engine telegraph, a ship's wheel, and a damage-control board. You just point and click to set direction, change speed, or check areas hit. Pointing off screen takes you to the

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Task Force 1942: Part arcade, part strategy.

Port or *Starboard Bridge*, where you access stations such as *Gun Director*, *Torpedo Director*, *Binoculars*, and more. It may take you a while to become familiar with the interface, but at least you won't bump your head on the passageways.

The view through the windows is just as realistic. You're close enough to the action to see torpedo wakes and gun flashes, not to mention the towering splashes of near misses, fires on board, and flares. The rugged volcanic scenery of the Solomon Islands is represented nicely, and lends a properly ominous feel as you order your light cruisers around a blind corner.

The game features more than 40 classes of warships, including transports, destroyers, cruisers, and battleships of both navies. Each ship is modeled in detail, with particular attention paid to hulls, stacks, turrets, and superstructures — not only to please the eye, but to let you ID it long before it gets too close. Ship's officers in the South Pacific couldn't wait until they saw the whites of their enemies' eyes, but had to identify their target fast — preferably before it shot back. "Friendly fire" was a sad reality in the fog of this war, and MicroProse includes an ID book so that you can bone up on enemy-ship profiles. Quick and accurate ship identification will save digital lives on your side, but if you want to wimp out, just turn off the friendly-fire option.

As soon as the sun goes down, the Japanese have the advantage. American radar was in its infancy, and Japanese night-vision technology was superior. Once you find other ships at night, you may have to fire a few starshells to illuminate your target. In battle, use tracer shells to monitor your aim.

No "smart weapons" here; you sight your target from the *Gun Director* station and let the mechanical computer aim the turrets. If the fire-control computer get damaged, you'll have to estimate range, speed, and heading of the target and aim your turrets manually. It's a lot tougher than it sounds, especially when you're under fire.

Most of the time you'll be relying on reconnaissance and intelligence reports for advance information regarding enemy movements. Reliable sightings are always best, but usually mean the enemy has sighted you, too. At least you can launch air searches from any friendly base.

Sightings appear on the chart as a cross that fades as the information ages. Current sightings are obviously more reliable than hours-old information. Clicking on the sighting cross gives details about time seen, course, speed, and task-group makeup. This information, by the way, may be only partially correct.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Command a single ship and Task Force 1942 is packed with arcade action. Great graphics images provide an exciting environment as you pop from one battle station to another, and watch through the binoculars as you set the Imperial Navy aflame. Commanding a division or task group requires strong strategic skills, and getting the knack of maneuvering large formations of ships takes some practice. Anticipating your enemy improves your chances, as it takes quite a while for a couple of dozen ships to turn in unison.

But commanding a campaign is the whole enchilada. Here you may have to make decisions more carefully and much less flamboyantly. A repaired ship, even if out of commission for several months, lives to fight another day. Long-range planning aside, you'll probably take the *Gun Director*'s chair when the action heats up.

How does Task Force 1942 stack up among the pack of WWII simulations? Solid strategic elements coupled with the adrenaline high of running a simulated ship make this game a good mix. With one foot in the arcade camp and the other in strategy, Task Force 1942 demands well-rounded players. The simulation is real-time and rewarding, the strategic elements are historically accurate, and the graphics images make it a pleasure to play. Fire when ready.

1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

MicroProse Software, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible, 2MB RAM (EMS recommended), DOS 5.0 or later; VGA, MCGA; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster; requires hard-disk drive; joystick or mouse recommended; $69.95

LEGENDS OF VALOUR

By Peter Olafson

First impressions are important. Sometimes. SSI's Legends of Valour is awfully nice-looking stuff. The larger buildings in this new single-player fantasy RPG loom up against the sky and seem to occupy physical space. Lavish detail covers all sorts of sweet spots: an underground zoo with fantastic creatures pacing in their cages, glimmering waterfalls, watchfires burning atop stanchions at night, a great sailing ship, the sun-dappled interiors of buildings. Your first few sojourns in Legends of Valour are bound to be occasions of joyful discovery.

Regrettably, this first impression is short-lived. Legends of Valour eventually proves to be less than the sum of these sumptuous parts. It doesn't play half as well as it looks, and it often manages to muck up

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Legends of Valour looks better than it plays.

even those things it does do right. Comparisons with Ultima Underworld are inevitable, so let's get them out of the way. Legends of Valour sports the free-scrolling movement and bit-mapped walls of Origin's celebrated dungeon crawl, but there the similarities end.

One big difference between Legends of Valour and Ultima Underworld is that much of Legends takes place on the surface — in the expansive town of Mitteldorf, with iridescent blue sky above and hordes of nonplayer characters going about their business.

Above all, Ultima Underworld is consistent: The game proper is every bit as good as the engine that drives it. It finds its tone, sets its rules, and sticks to them. You come away with the impression that it's a real place. Although I've *lived* every minute I've spent down in the Stygian Abyss, I've only *played* Legends of Valour. It's the difference between an environment and a game system. Legends of Valour is of the second persuasion, a game system crowded with interesting, but undeveloped, ideas, without the necessary character and depth to pretend it's something else.

Still, Legends has its strengths. The graphics images are pretty, though not quite all of a piece. (It's possible, for instance, to read a game editor in the Bard's Tale-ish way the tiles have been assembled.) Combat has been kept to a modest level. The movement is smooth, speedy, and intuitive — it actually has more in common with Wolfenstein 3-D than with Ultima Underworld. But movement is always on the level. You won't find anything quite like Ultima Underworld's plethora of ramps, platforms, and levels within levels. (Stairways are handled in the same teleport-style fashion as Ultima Underworld's between-level stairs.) And that's the thing about Legends of Valour: It leaves you kind of flat in some way.

Consider your ability to peer through windows (and even the chance you'll be fined for too much peering). It's a great touch — something Ultima Underworld couldn't really do — but you can't peer *out* of these same windows. Didn't it occur to the designers that looking out from a hiding place might be as interesting as the voyeurism of looking in?

There may even be someone home when you do your looking. Certainly a lot of people are wandering around — humans, dwarfs, werewolves — with professions ranging from the conventional (gravedigger and bounty hunter) to the arcane (freebooter), from hooded scribes (who may afford you some "insurance") to priestesses (hubba-hubba!). But in conversation, all typically prove to be little more than mannequins. Ask what, ask why, pickpocket, insult, fight. There's no flow, no development, no real content.

Even the spliced-together insults have no evident purpose, and sometimes don't even make sense. A nonplayer character will sometimes tell you, "None of your business," if you just ask for the time of day, but may happily spill his or her name, business, and even religion when asked. Not to mention that everyone looks like everyone else. For instance, all the human men are dead ringers for the rock star Pete Townshend. Really.

HEY YOU — YEAH, YOU

Actually, they're not *quite* that standardized. If you bump into a shop wall displaying a counter, up pops a digitized photo of the proprietor. Still, bumping into things is more a way to start a fight, not make friends. Once again, Legends of Valour leaves you flat.

And that's just the beginning. The inventory is limited to seven items (regardless of size, and not counting commodities you can buy and sell). For a community with such an active, lively population, home furnishings are surprisingly Spartan: tavern tables, stanchions, some tapestries, a fireplace, some odd wall scrawlings, obsidian eggs.

Combat is a boring, Elvira-derived exercise of bloody blotches and surprised faces — something that would make you grateful for the auto-combat option until you realize the latter initiates battle automatically the moment someone insults you. The town guards are just plain out of control; you can be arrested and hauled off to the Hall of Justice in the northeastern part of the city merely for some inadvertent window snooping or for "acting suspiciously."

On the surface, you can always tell your position within the city from a complete, but detail-free, map available from within the game. The package also comes with a large and largely unannotated parchment map of Mitteldorf.

Your initial task (aside from simply continuing to live) is to fill in the details so that you'll know what folks are talking about when you begin running errands and undertaking missions. This is a tall order in itself; many structures have two stories and some have elaborate basements tied to a vast network of tunnels.

In this subterranean city, the above-ground you-are-here map turns into an automapper. Unlike Ultima Underworld, however, Legends of Valour doesn't save the map as you go. You'll need to copy it by hand if you want to preserve it from visit to visit. In the case of the larger tunnels — which extend clear across Mitteldorf — that's an arduous task and an unfair demand.

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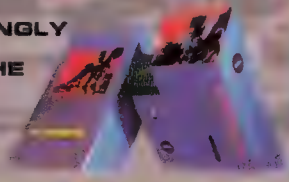

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Legends of Valour never really generates any suspense. The dungeons are rather dull places. The game has a nasty habit of taking shortcuts — throwing up static, representational screens to show dusk and dawn, as well as your sentencing when arrested — instead of building these elements into the game proper to develop atmosphere. There's little sound. The character-creation scheme does let you create a lifelike face — far more so than those in games such as Flames of Freedom — and it's a kick later when it turns up on a wanted poster.

Finally, the intro consists of several hard-disk-intensive animations that don't play well on the PC — my guess is they've been imported from the Amiga. They lend zilch to the story, yet occupy 2.5 of Legends' 7.5 megabytes on the hard disk. That's bound to be irritating to someone trying to squeeze the game onto a small drive.

Legends of Valour is a beginning. Although the game's not an utterly unpromising beginning, there's a lot more to do here before it can walk the dark spaces under the earth with Ultima Underworld.

Dune II is the best piece of PC software based on the book.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Avenue, Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, 800) 245-4525, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible, 640K RAM, DOS 3.1 or later, DOS 5.0 recommended; VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro; requires Microsoft-compatible mouse; requires hard-disk drive, 8.3MB free; $59.95

DUNE II

By Wayne Kawamoto

Who would have thought they meant games when those TV ads asked you to "buy American"? That's just what you should do if you're looking for a computer-game version of *Dune*, the classic science-fiction novel by the late Frank Herbert. Buy American, buy Virgin's Dune II, and you'll get the best piece of PC software based on the book (and the ensuing movie). In fact, Dune II is a great strategy game that stands on its own.

Dune II comes right on the heels of Virgin's first Dune, which was created in Europe and released in mid-1992. But unlike a movie sequel, Dune II is no simple supplement. It's an entirely different game in both scope and genre.

II IS BETTER THAN I

As it turned out, Virgin's American and European subsidiaries unknowingly — and simultaneously — created two different versions of Dune. By the time the goof was discovered, it was too late, and so 1992 saw two Dunes from Virgin.

The first one, the European version, was a peculiar combination of role play and strategy that followed the movie's plot roughly. It wasn't a bad effort. But Dune II, the American version, takes the popular science-fiction novel, adds the insightful game play of a SimCity, combines it with the real-time action of a war game, and ends up as a compelling and exciting strategy game.

Dune is an arid, barren, and nearly uninhabitable planet known for high-speed windstorms, huge sand worms, and melange, a spice-like drug found only in that world; it extends human life significantly and makes interstellar travel possible. As a result, melange is one valuable commodity. To increase spice production, the Emperor offers control of the planet and a cut of the profits to the house that can deliver the most. Three families take up the offer: House Atreides, House Ordos, and House Harkonnen. Cast as one of them, you must build your empire and mine the spice to gain control of the planet.

With few rules, it's a virtual free-for-all. In many ways, Dune II feels like SimCity-meets-war games. No irate Sims here, but while you're mining the spice, you'll engage in frequent battle with your enemies, the competing houses.

You must build your structures first, ranging from weapons factories and radar stations to barracks and refining facilities. Creating these buildings takes time and money. Meanwhile, your computer opponent is building, too, and will soon try to sabotage your operations.

THE BALANCE OF POWER

Everything is Dune II happens in real time, usually with several things occurring at once, much like the action in MindCraft's Siege. Tell your tanks and troops what to guard and whom to attack. Once you locate spice, tell the harvesters to move there and collect it. Start production on new weapons, recruit men, and oversee construction of your facilities. Give an order and move on to something else. Dune II takes some serious multitasking, which makes for some frantic and intense entertainment.

Dune II's packed with strategy. You can build weapons to gain military might, but you'll eventually run out of credits to fund your war machine. To get credits, you've got to mine spice. To win ultimately, you must balance firepower and spice production. And along the way, watch out for those worms — they'll eat anything that moves (including tanks).

THE CRUEL, THE HEARTLESS HARKONNEN

Because you can pick any of the three houses — each with its own characteristics and weaponry — Dune II offers plenty of replayability. Take

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the side of the cruel and heartless Harkonnen, for example, and you'll have access to more firepower (and perhaps more fun) than you would stepping into the shoes of the white-hatted House of Atreides.

The documentation, like the barren planet, is a little sparse. It's fortunate for newcomers to the game that Dune II provides a cake-walk of a first mission to build your confidence and give you a feel for the game. But it gets challenging fast. The second level is tougher, but by level 3 you're in the thick of things and on your own — no more mister nice guy.

THE SIGHTS, THE SOUNDS

Dune II features detailed graphics images and an impressive introduction. Accompanying these graphics images is narration without music — quiet, stark, and effective. It sets the mood nicely.

The soundtrack is just as professional. Unlike games that make you want to reach for the volume control within minutes of beginning play, Dune II features some cinematic-style music that's more subtle than symphonic.

The game also includes great sound effects, including the screams of soldiers, the blare of cannons, and screen-rocking explosions. If you move away from the battles you'll hear the war sounds diminish, then increase when you return. Soldiers even respond to your commands verbally. (You'll need an audio card to hear all this.)

Dune II is well planned and filled with addictive action. It's a worthy addition to your collection. Made in the good old U.S.A. rarely means so much.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Virgin Games, 18061 Fitch Avenue, Irvine, CA 92714, (800) 874-4607; IBM PC or compatible, 286 or faster recommended, DOS 3.3 or later, speech requires 4MB RAM; VGA; requires hard-disk drive; supports AdLib, AdLib Gold, Roland, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro; $59.95

ATAC's a war-game/flight-sim hybrid.

ATAC: THE SECRET WAR AGAINST DRUGS

By Wayne Kawamoto

From the outside, ATAC looks like just another flight sim fresh off the assembly line. But MicroProse's ATAC: The Secret War Against Drugs aims to be more than just some typical fly-by-night sim. It wants you to plan missions and campaigns, too.

PLUS AND MINUS

Because it's something different, it's a sight for soaring eyes. ATAC is a new model, something MicroProse calls *strategic flight simulation*.

It's clearly a hybrid, because it combines war-game and flight-simulation elements. You get to create missions, make tactical decisions, and then pilot the aircraft.

In the end, though, ATAC falls short. Although it may offer two satisfactory flight simulators — an F-22 Advanced Tactical Fighter and an AH-64A Apache Gunship — but they're wrapped in an only-average strategy game.

SOUTH AMERICAN AIR ATTACK

It's the year 2003. The United Nations has asked you to help eliminate Colombian drug operations and has given you the Advanced Tactical Air Command (ATAC), an elite task force of F-22 jet fighters and Apache helicopters, to accomplish the mission.

As ATAC's leader, you'll view daily intelligence reports and decide where and how to strike the enemy.

With the potential targets in mind, you select the appropriate aircraft for the job, then arm them with a variety of weapons.

You can choose any combination of four F-22s or Apaches for a mission and equip them with everything from Sidewinder and Maverick to Harpoon and Hellfire missiles. Armed to the teeth and ready for action, you specify each aircraft's waypoints and targets. Once a mission's underway, you can jump from cockpit to cockpit — M1 Tank Platoon style.

You tell your pilots where to fly and what to attack — but unlike "shoot and forget" weapons, you have to monitor your aircrafts' progress and take control of them if necessary.

At times, the planes will reach their destination with the enemy long gone and may just turn for home. If not, you'll have to jump in, search out that moving caravan, and eliminate it yourself. (Good help is so hard to find.)

As intelligence reports start to come in, you can rearrange each aircraft's mission to adapt to changing conditions.

DO IT AGAIN

Another aspect of the game involves you in resupplying your agents. Here things get a little vague: You drop off supplies to areas you want to investigate and just assume that the good guys get them.

If you don't support your local neighborhood agent, you'll be left with no intelligence reports and not a clue as to where to attack.

As a flight simulator, ATAC is solid. It can't compare in detail to the Falcons or Gunship 2000s of the world, but it's certainly up to MicroProse's standards and beats out a

number of less-dedicated flight simulators such as Konami's Top Gun.

ATAC offers the requisite exterior, chase plane, and missile views, plus a graduated horizon in attractive graphics. In the digitized cockpit you'll find a *Heads-Up Display* (HUD), 3-D radar, and the basic controls, including flaps for the F-22 and collector and cyclic controls for the Apache.

FLY RIGHT ON BY

ATAC features three levels of difficulty. Level 1 gives you airtime training in the wild blue yonder, and lets you pilot an Apache or F-22 with unlimited weapons to take out any enemy units.

On the second level, you go one on one against a single drug lord to cut his operations down to size — easy training.

On the third level, you're on your own, immersed in tense battle with four ruthless drug lords — quite a challenge. The drug kingpins are armed with more than revolvers and machetes. These guys have serious bucks, and their stash of Soviet weapons includes MiG-19, MiG-21, MiG-23, and MiG-29 aircraft. (Must have bought them from a money-hungry Mother Russia.)

Gamers will find some challenge on the first level, the flight simulator. The friendly skies host plenty of action with hordes of MiGs, but the only objective is seeing how high you can hike your point score, arcade style.

ATAC's tactics are on the basic side. Essentially, you attack shipments; the game lacks more-strategic targets, such as supply lines and gasoline depots.

You make the decisions, and once the mission is underway, you stay on top of the action, monitoring the overall progress of your team, jumping in and piloting as necessary. But the promise of a chess game in the sky never materializes.

The documentation isn't up to MicroProse's usual standards. The user's manual assumes you've flown copter and airplane sims before and neglects to explain key concepts, such as the use of flaps on an airplane and the function of the helicopter's collector and cyclic — essential information for rookie flyboys.

The manual's discussion of helicopter control also contains some errors. Even so, it does an adequate job of explaining the program's campaign aspects.

BASIC TACTICS

ATAC plays much like a flight simulator with its own tactical mission designer. Each mission you call leads to the overall success or failure of the entire campaign,

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adding a different element to the flight-simulator genre.

Strategic flight simulation is a new concept, and ATAC succeeds to some degree. For the average flight jockey, the game is satisfying.

But for Top Gun flight-sim fans who play as hard as they fight, the flight simulator's lack of detail and the game's only-adequate strategic elements make ATAC easy to fly right on by.

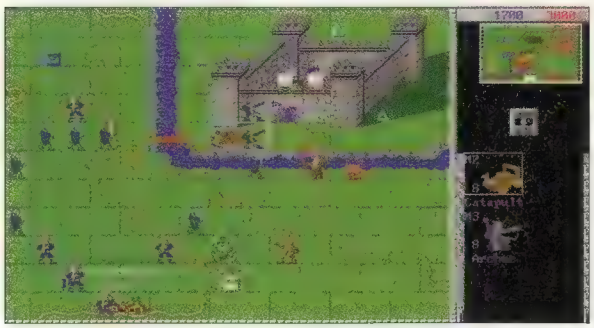
1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

MicroProse Software, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (800) 879-7529, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible, 1MB RAM, DOS 5.0 or later; VGA; requires hard-disk drive; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster; joystick recommended; $59.95

CONQUERED KINGDOMS

By Wayne Kawamoto

Games move like transients, shifting from table to hard drive like a hobo looking for the right train. Everything from *Monopoly* to *Dungeons and Dragons* has leaped off the board and into the PC.



Conquered Kingdoms: solid strategy, primitive graphics.

Computerized board games generally come in two flavors — those that create new interactive worlds, and those that use the PC's ability to track numbers, like entertaining spreadsheets with static pieces.

Quantum Quality Production's Conquered Kingdoms belongs in the first category. Set in a fantasy world where ogres roam and gargoyles play, this strategy war game lets you fight your way to the top. But though Conquered Kingdoms features solid strategy and compelling game play, it could use a better generation of graphics.

KING OF THE CASTLE

Your goal in Conquered Kingdoms is to score points by occupying the castles and towns in a given territory. The player with the largest number of points after a set number of rounds wins. Natural resources — coal, wood, and gold — come first in this game. By occupying a resource on the map, you claim it for your own use. At first the program lets you create your armies from a variety of soldiers and fantasy creatures — you can get whatever you can afford. But resources are the key to recruiting troops later and to making weapons to strengthen your ranks.

You also decide where you want to place your armies to begin the campaign. Each town, village, and castle has a point value. By occupying and claiming these strongholds, you gain points. The more castles you occupy, the more each castle is worth. (Call it *synergy* if you want the five-dollar word.) Owning a castle is also a prerequisite for generating new units of warriors.

Throughout the game you command swordsmen, archers, knights, officers, and cavalry, along with fantasy units such as rogs, dragons, wizards, and others.

Each piece carries a certain number of moves per turn according to the terrain. Conquered Kingdoms displays a scrolling map that shows portions of the landscape in detail.

GET THE MOVES

To move a piece, simply select it, then click where you'd like to go. Position a piece on a town or resource (gold, coal, or wood), and you claim it as yours. When you're within fighting range of the enemy, you'll engage in battle, much as in role-play games: Move your troops, get within range and attack, and most importantly of all, preserve those almighty hit points.

It follows the flow of nature that archers can fight from long distance, while foot soldiers must occupy the same square to slash it out. The computer determines the outcome of each individual skirmish and shows an animated vignette to depict the outcome. When there's more than one piece to attack, the computer lets you choose which to engage. It sounds harder than it really is — in all, the interface is well done and intuitive.

THROW BACK

The pieces in Conquered Kingdoms enjoy a chess-like hierarchy, in which each one lords it over certain other pieces, in which each has its own Achilles' heel. A lancer takes out cavalry easily, for example, while catapults and knights cream archers. And though wizards throw devastating fireballs, they lack any self-defense skills. Think of it as a game of "paper-rock-scissors" on the PC. Of course, these tactical considerations make for a lot of strategic decisions.

You can choose to play against the computer, a worthy competitor, or against another player, either face to face or across the telephone wires via modem. An intriguing alternative is to play by mail or e-mail using a special game file you send back and forth. In either case, players take turns moving pieces, then wait for the computer to determine the outcome and calculate the current point spread.

Conquered Kingdoms features 21 levels of difficulty and a campaign mode that lets you move from county to county to conquer all. Some domains can be as small as 16 counties, while the largest contain more than 100. If all goes well, you'll start the dominoes falling and become king of the realm eventually.

Continued on page 72

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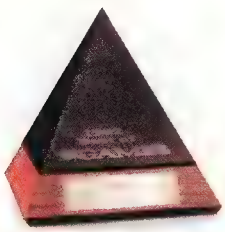

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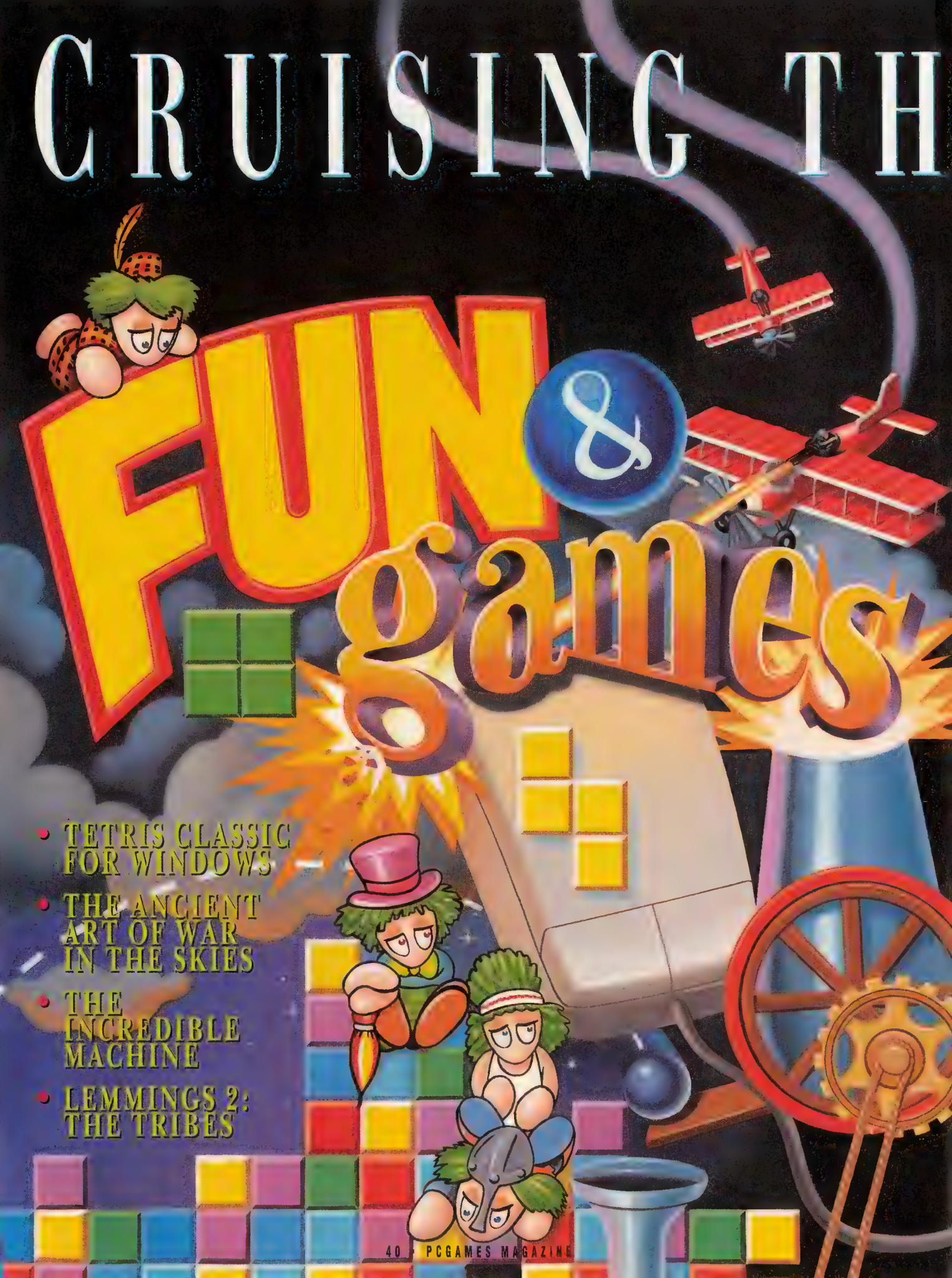


- TETRIS CLASSIC FOR WINDOWS
- THE ANCIENT ART OF WAR IN THE SKIES
- THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE
- LEMMINGS 2: THE TRIBES

E PC MIDWAY

Remember pinball at the penny arcade — or ring toss at the county fair? Step right up — PCGames looks at a quartet of challengers that'll test your reflexes and satisfy a yen for pure-and-simple fun.

Some of us have lives, you know. Some of us like to play games on the PC, but don't have untold hours to waste killing trolls in dungeons, figuring out how to work the world's most sophisticated fighter jet, or studying the computer's latest 4-3 defense in a game of virtual pigskin. We want to have fun, and we want it now.

For anyone who needs to satisfy a yen for an old-fashioned, pure-and-simple challenge once in a while, the PC platform offers a few great games that'll hook you for sure. These teasers emphasize hand/eye coordination and puzzle-solving skills over grand strategy and clever dialogue. There's something addictive in the straightforward way you play such games — building walls, shooting down triplanes, herding tribes of rodents, and popping balloons. They seem to say — even when you win — *okay, let's see you do it again*. Of course, no computer game's quite as simple as the games of skill hawked along the midway of your local county fair. But then, these games aren't trying to steal you blind, either.

THE RUSSIANS ARE STILL COMING!

The game that keeps re-inventing itself just did it again. **Tetris Classic** from Spectrum HoloByte is, at its core, still the original game, but it's enhanced to take advantage of today's more-powerful PCs.

This Soviet sensation has intoxicated the computer gaming world for almost half a decade now. Today, this maddeningly simple game of falling colored blocks, designed for the Windows environment, is out to vacuum up any wilderness gamers the Tetris steamroller missed years ago. Tetris Classic is back to basics, as it were. Although several versions and variations have become popular in their own right, this one's the original Tetris challenge revisited. Play is simple. Differently colored, differently shaped blocks fall into a pit, and as they fall,

BY ED FERRELL

Illustration Daniel Kirk

Stunning graphics images enhance a PC classic — Tetris now includes illustrations of scenes from the Russian folk tale Ruslan and Ludmila.

you rotate and guide them to form solid lines across the bottom. As you complete a solid line, it disappears.

Trouble is, you can't always build that solid line. As blocks begin to accumulate in the pit, giving you less room in which to work, it's less and less likely you can complete a line. When you're successful, the game gives you still another level, where the blocks fall faster and faster. Some reward.

But this version's stunning graphics images are the real reward. Rendered in 256 colors, these beautiful pictures represent scenes from the classic Russian fairy tale *Ruslan and Ludmila*. Because a new scene appears only when you advance a level, you'll have to get good to see the whole story. The game also features a new and richer soundtrack — stirring music from Glinka's opera based on the same Russian folk tale.

You don't have to play solo, either. Like the stand-up arcade version of the game, Tetris Classic for Windows offers a dual pit where two people can fight it out in either cooperative or competitive mode. (The former is something of a misnomer: After you both go for the same hole in the wall, cooperation gets a bit thin.)

How many shapes can Tetris assume? Other incarnations include **Super Tetris** ($49.95), also a Windows game, and **Welltris** ($34.95). Welltris is worth a look when you get tired of Tetris' 2-D perspective; Welltris has you looking down from the top of the pit, and guiding the pieces as they slip along the sides of a well. Still another mutation is **Wordtris** ($44.95). In this game, all the shapes are alphabet blocks; you try to form words, not complete lines. More like a crossword puzzle, Wordtris is the least attractive of the Tetris family, but it's a good brain exercise. Just leave the dictionary at home — action is a *little* too fast to spend time paging through paper.

CURSE YOU, RED BARON!

What could be simpler than World War I aerial combat? In the words of German ace Oswald Boelcke, "In air fights it is absolutely essential to fly in such a way that your adversary cannot shoot at you." Good advice — but then, so is "Don't get killed." MicroProse's **The Ancient Art of War in the Skies** lets you participate in WWI dogfights, but doesn't force you to become a pilot to play. Like Boelcke's advice, it cuts to the quick.

This game completes a series started ages ago by Broderbund with its then-landmark **The Ancient Art of War** (Novato, CA, 800-521-6263, $44.95), one of the first games to include an editor that let you create new campaigns. Partially based on Sun Tzu's *The Ancient Art of War* — a handbook for military leaders written more than 2500 years ago — the original PC title featured simple war games that were more like chess than complex simulations. Although not strictly ancient, there *is* an art to aerial combat, and much of Sun Tzu's advice still applies; thus The Ancient Art of War in the Skies.

A mouse is a necessity for this easy-interface game, as you order automatic flight runs or set automatic flight paths and orders by pointing and clicking. Once your planes are on their way, you can take control of any of your aircraft

Dogfighting in The Ancient Art of War in the Skies combines arcade action and strategic thinking. Watch the 3-D scrolling map as you take off in your Sopwith Camel and go up against the greatest aces of World War I.

You can't get there from here — or can you? The Incredible Machine challenges you to find gloriously complicated solutions to simple tasks.

at any time to join the dogfights and bombing runs. Training is a snap in this arcade-style title — each side has only two types of planes. The British fly Sopwith Camel fighters and Handley-Page bombers, while the Germans launch Fokker triplanes and Gotha bombers. You don't even sit in the pilot's seat. Instead, everything takes place on a stunning 3-D scrolling map. The game displays a full exterior view of the action, and you handle the airplanes much as you would a remote-control model. Soon you'll be doing half rolls, loops, and hammerhead stalls. Immelman turns and chandelles come in handy as you try to bomb your enemy more than he bombs you.

You can't always keep out of harm's way, though. Safe as it sounds, you'll flinch when you watch your bird get shot down and go up in flames. You'll repair damage as quickly as possible to keep as many planes in the air as you can. Documentation studded with photographs and quotations from great pilots puts you in the proper spirit.

The game includes 20 historic campaigns and a "who's who" of aces controlling the enemy air command. Each has his own style of air attack, so you can fly against everyone from Richthofen to Fonck to Guynemer. For comic relief, you can take on the famous French commander Lou P. de Loupe. Sun Tzu himself even is included, though in his day, they never flew anything bigger than a kite. Like the older Ancient Art of War games, this one also lets you customize play with an incredible scenario editor.

Air combat circa 1917 pitted cloth and wire crates in dogfights above the clouds. More like duels than modern smart-weapon warfare, it was the time of the dashing, chivalrous ace, not the techno-exterminating jet jockey of today. This unusual mix of real-time arcade and strategy challenges both fingers and brain. It's a welcome break from the gaggle of high-tech flight simulators on your shelves.

CHAIN REACTION

If you think you can build a better mousetrap, **The Incredible Machine** (this issue's Editors' Choice, p. 80) is the game for you. This arcade-style boggler from Sierra tries to stump you with 75 puzzles. Goals are laughably simple on the surface — catch a mouse, pop a balloon, or put a baseball in a bucket. Easy, you think, but the solutions are often less than plain in this digital erector set.

The Incredible Machine is an oddball game in which bowling balls, basketballs, and baseballs play a part in the solutions. You'll use ropes and pulleys, belts and conveyors, even cats, fish, and mice. To get the basketball into the bucket, for instance, you may have to put a trampoline under the ball, make it bounce to a ramp, and roll it down a chute. Other solutions are far more involved. To pop the balloon, you might have to set off a chain reaction by dropping a tennis ball on a flashlight, which shines the beam through a magnifying glass, which focuses on a cannon fuse, which fires a cannonball, which hits a pair of scissors, which cuts the balloon string, which sends it flying into a burning candle, which pops the balloon. Whew! There may be simpler solutions, but not in this game. Successive puzzles won't let you skip around, by the way; you have to solve them in order.

The Incredible Machine owes a lot to Rube Goldberg and the board game Mousetrap. Although there are always

Let my Lemmings go: Pick actions from the palette and lead the 12 tribes to freedom.

enough tools to solve the puzzle, later puzzles include red herrings in the toolbox. Solutions to all but the very beginning puzzles are nowhere near obvious. Much of the fun, in fact, derives from the odd connections you must make between fans and bellows, ramps and balloons. The game rewards counterintuitive thinking, and to be successful, you've got to look at objects in a skewed kind of way.

A free-form mode provides a workshop for all you mad tinkerers out there. With no puzzle to solve and an unlimited amount of equipment, you can go hog wild, even to the point of altering the laws of physics. Set the gravity to that of the planet Saturn, or the air pressure equal to that at the bottom of Earth's oceans, and see what happens.

THEY'RE BACK . . .

The wait's been long, but it was worth it. By press time, Psygnosis will have delivered **Lemmings 2: The Tribes** to your local software store. It better not be long after this game arrives that those tiny little green-haired numbskulls make an appearance on your monitor. This is no weak sequel. Game players devoured the first titles in the series, **Lemmings** ($49.95) and **Oh No! More Lemmings** ($34.95); this return engagement is just as addictive.

Twelve new tribes of Lemmings are in a *lot* of trouble. They may be talented, but they need your help — badly. Like their predecessors, these little ones follow each other everywhere — around, in, on, and over. You can divert them, though — and that's the name of the game. Your job is to help the Lemming tribes through eight levels of danger. Once you move them on, they join others of their kind and head off looking for the gold talisman.

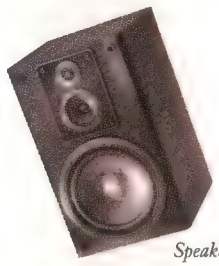
Moving the Lemmings from one level to another is tougher than it sounds, if only because these creatures are bent on self-destruction. When the game begins, for instance, they may be hopping off the edge of a cliff. They don't do anything unless you tell them, and they keep doing whatever you tell them until you tell them to stop.

To bend a Lemming to your will, just click on one of the actions in the on-screen palette, then click on one of the Lemmings. If they need to bust a hole in the floor, for example, you'll pick a digger Lemming from the palette and click on one of the critters. That Lemming then digs until you tell him to quit.

All kinds of actions are available to coax the Lemmings on to the next level. Click on a building Lemming, and he constructs a tower of bricks. Click on an archery Lemming, and he shoots an arrow. Your task is to figure

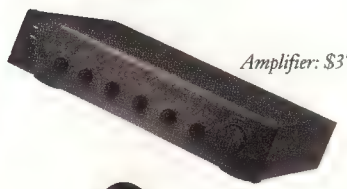
FALLING TO PIECES LOOKING FOR THE ULTIMATE MULTIMEDIA UPGRADE?

Speaker: $150

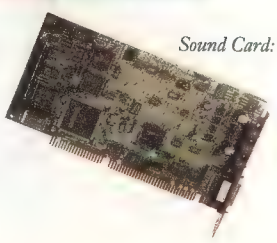

Speaker: $150

CD-ROM Drive: $799

Software: $1480


Amplifier: $379

Synthesizer: $399


Sound Card: $299

Microphone: $99

out just what combination of actions will move those little Lemmings in the right direction.

Each Lemming Land encompasses actions particular to those Lemmings in residence. Beach Lemmings can surf; Polar Land Lemmings can slalom past icy dangers and throw snowballs to build bridges. Medieval Land Lemmings can fence their way through walls; some Circus Lemmings can even inflate balloons to sail over structures and valleys.

Although you can win by getting only one surviving Lemming through all eight levels, the game rewards compassion. The more Lemmings that live, the brighter the color of the talisman. You may win the day, leading representatives of all 12 tribes to safety, and end up having to settle for the bronze instead of the gold.

STEP RIGHT UP

Games like these offer the kinds of simple pleasures you won't find in a 20-megabyte flight simulator or role-playing monstrosity. And more "PC midway" titles — sequels and spinoffs from this quartet, in particular — are sure to follow. Simpler games remind us of simpler times, days spent tossing balls at milk bottles at the county fair. But only on the PC midway do you have a *real* chance of winning. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

The Ancient Art of War in the Skies
MicroProse Software
180 Lakefront Drive
Hunt Valley, MD 21030
(800) 879-7529
$69.95
640K, VGA/MCGA
mouse recommended
supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster, SoundMaster

The Incredible Machine
Sierra On-Line
P.O. Box 485
Coarsegold, CA 93614
(800) 326-6654
$49.95
640K/386SX or faster, VGA requires mouse, hard drive supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster, ThunderBoard

Lemmings 2: The Tribes
Psygnosis
29 Saint Mary's Court
Brookline, MA 02146
(617) 731-3553
$59.95
640K, VGA
requires hard drive
supports SoundBlaster/Pro, AdLib/Gold, Roland, ProAudio Spectrum, Tandy 3-Voice, Gravis UltraSound

Tetris Classic for Windows
Spectrum HoloByte
2490 Mariner Square Loop
Alameda, CA 94501
(510) 522-3584
$44.95
2MB, VGA/SVGA
supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster
requires Windows, hard drive

RELAX.

- *True 16-bit stereo audio record/playback to 44kHz*
- *Built-in 100 watt stereo amplifier*
- *High-quality speakers*
- *MIDI interface*
- *Photo CD ready (first session)*
- *IBM standard joystick port*

- *Advanced stereo synthesizer*
- *Single cable and interface card for easy set up*
- *Compatible with Sound Blaster™, Windows 3.1™ and MPC sound standards*
- *Optional bass enhancement system*

Now go from CD pieces to CDPC™. And avoid the hassle and high cost of buying separate components. Because the CDPC line of products are complete 16-bit multimedia CD systems bringing together all the excitement of CD-ROM sound and graphics — into one remarkably affordable, plug 'n play compact unit. For less than half the cost of the individual components.

Plus, you'll get a bundle of top-selling software. Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego? — Deluxe Version, Compton's® Multimedia Encyclopedia and MacroMind Action! And for more demanding users, there's CDPC-XL with a double speed NEC CD-ROM drive for ultra-fast data access, and a SCSI bus connection for adding peripherals.

So don't go to pieces. Simply get the ultimate. Visit a CDPC dealer near you and relax.

MPC Multimedia PC

MEDIA VISION

Media Vision, 3185 Laurelview Court, Fremont, CA 94538. 510-770-8600, FAX: 510-770-9592.
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Circle 40 on Reader Service Card.

Sight & Sound IMPROVEMENTS

BY TOM CARLTON

Promises, promises . . . bigger and better games, more sound, more video, more interaction. Is it true — will those little compact-disc platters, with their hundreds of megabytes of storage space, really revolutionize the way we work and play? Are you still living in the prehistoric age if you don't have a CD-ROM player? How will you ever sort it all out?

Multimedia may or may not turn out to be the panacea it's made out to be, but one thing's certain: CD-ROM (*compact-disc read-only memory*) will play some part in PC computing. How big a part is up for grabs, even now, but the fact remains that thanks to falling player prices and a growing interest in compact discs for everything from games to reference works to software distribution, more and more home-computer users are equipping their systems with this new peripheral.

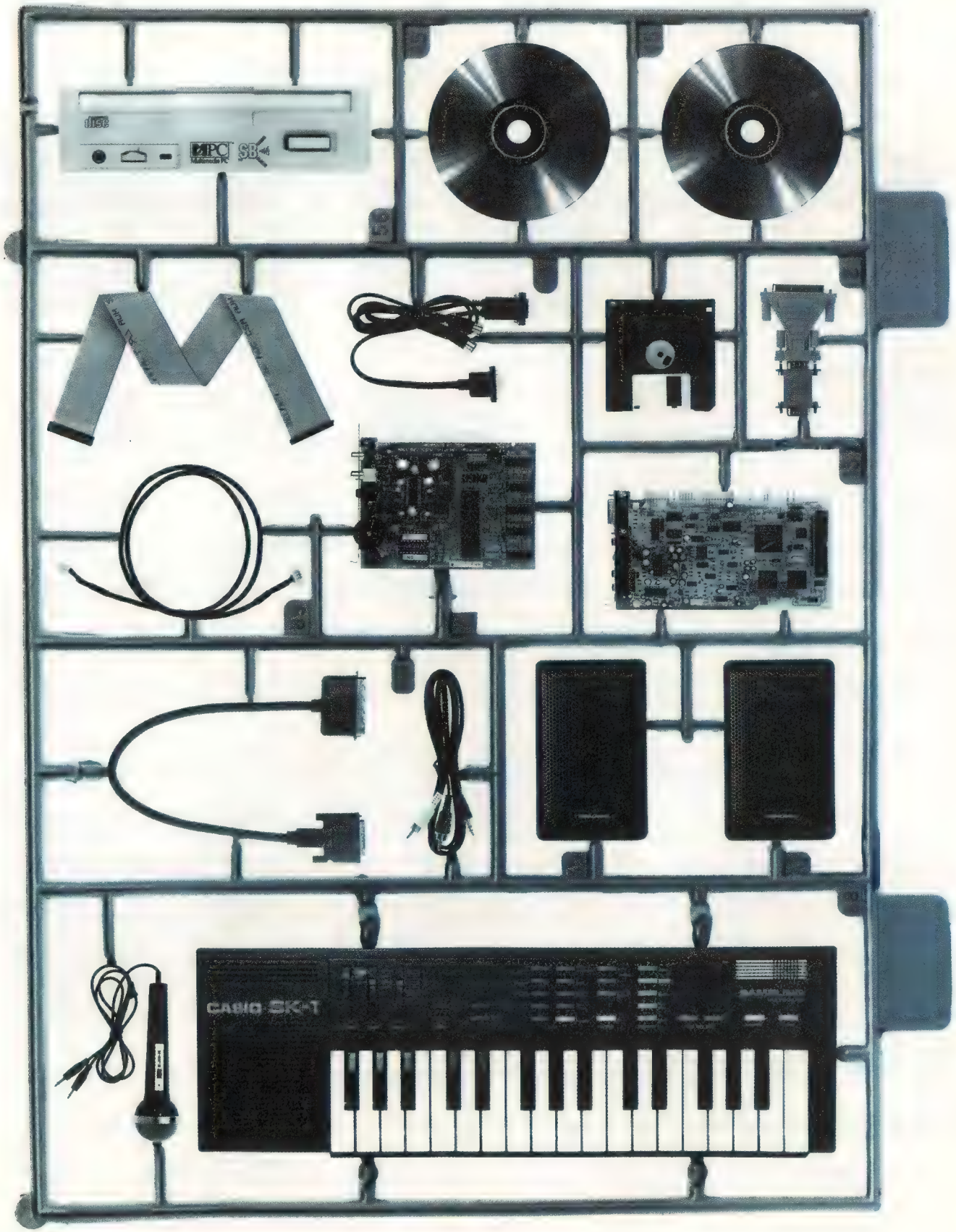
But untangling the wide variety of upgrade options out there isn't always simple, even after you've decided now's the time to make the move to multimedia. *PCGames* is here to help. When it comes to upgrading for multimedia/CD-ROM capability, you've got three basic choices:

- You can buy a new PC, one with multimedia components installed and ready to roll. That's expensive — and unnecessary if you already have a capable machine.
- You can purchase all the pieces separately for your current PC. That's risky, especially when it comes to compatibility.
- You can pick from several bundled packages that, when installed, upgrade your machine for multimedia.

That last choice is the cheapest, most convenient, and most reliable way to add multimedia to your existing personal computer. Not only does it ensure compatibility among the various components, but you'll also get hundreds or thousands of dollars' worth of software to start your CD collection.

Regardless of the dozens of other items packed into these upgrade kits, the two essential ingredients are the sound board and the CD-ROM drive. Do you need an 8-bit or a 16-bit sound card? Should the

Multimedia's the wave of the computing future — so upgrade your system with a CD-ROM player, a sound board, and a fleet of compact-disc titles. PCGames test-drives five kits that'll get you started.


MPC
SB
CASIO SK-1

FEATURES

COMPONENTS	CREATIVE LABS EDUTAINMENT	MEDIAVISION FUSION CD 16	NEC CD EXPRESS	NEC MULTIMEDIA GALLERY	SONY DESKTOP LIBRARY
SOUND BOARD	SoundBlaster Pro	Pro Audio Spectrum 16	no sound board	Pro Audio Spectrum 16	ProAudio Spectrum 16
sampling DAC resolution	8-bit	16-bit	not applicable	16-bit	16-bit
sampling dynamic range	48 decibels	90 decibels	not applicable	90 decibels	90 decibels
stereo synthesizer	1 stereo YMF262 OPL3	1 stereo YMF262 OPL3	not applicable	1 stereo YMF262 OPL3	1 stereo YMF262 OPL3
FM voices	20	20	not applicable	20	20
MIDI interface	yes	yes	not applicable	yes	yes
MIDI kit	optional	optional	not applicable	optional	optional
CD-ROM drive support	Matsushita proprietary	Sony proprietary	not applicable	standard SCSI	Sony proprietary
joystick port	yes	yes	not applicable	yes	yes
COMPATIBILITY					
AdLib	no	yes	not applicable	yes	yes
SoundBlaster	yes	yes	not applicable	yes	yes
Windows 3.1/MPC	yes	yes	not applicable	no	yes
CD-ROM DRIVE	Matsushita	Sony CDU31A	NEC CDR-25	NEC CDR-74	Sony CDU7305
average access time	390 milliseconds	490 milliseconds	800 milliseconds	280 milliseconds	550 milliseconds
sustained transfer rate	150K/second	150K/second	150K/second	300K/second	150K/second
Photo CD	needs driver	multisession	single session	single session	multisession
CD loading type	caddy	tray	tray	caddy	tray
SPEAKERS	yes	Labtec CS-550	Labtec CS-150	Labtec CS-150	3-watt Sony SRS-58PC
HEADPHONES	no	no	no	yes	no
BUNDLED TITLES	The Animals! SWT Multimedia Encyclopedia Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe The Secret of Monkey Island Loom Carmen Sandiego Just Grandma and Me Sherlock Holmes	Compton's Family Encyclopedia Wing Commander II Ultima Underworld Carmen Sandiego	GeoWorks Loom Publish It! Great Cities of the World Storytime Best of the Bureau Total Baseball The Family Doctor Toolworks Reference Library Wing Commander Ultima VI	New Grolier MM Encyclopedia Great Wonders of the World Carmen Sandiego Mavis Bacon Teaches Typing Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective Guinness Disk of World Records 1992	GeoWorks Tempra Access Kodak Photo Sampler The Presidents: It All Started with George The New Grolier MM Encyclopedia Time Magazine Compact Almanac Carmen Sandiego Great Wonders of the World
WARRANTY	1 year	1 year	2 years	2 years	1 year
PRICE	$699/$799	$699	$499	$999	$849/$1069

Table. Comparing features among multimedia upgrade kits.

CD-ROM drive be internal or external? What about standard- or double-speed drives? What's Photo CD and do you need it or want it? Should the kit be DOS only or both MPC (the industry's *multimedia personal computer* standard) and DOS CD compatible? Which software bundle's best for you?

Hear Ye, Hear Ye

What'll it be: 2 bits, 8 bits, 16 bits, a board? Your sound-card choice boils down to a question of how much audio quality you either demand or can afford.

The terms *8-bit* and *16-bit* specify how finely sound waves are digitally sampled — the more bits, the better the fidelity to the original. If you demand stereo-CD-quality sound, then a 16-bit board is your flavor. You can get by with an 8-bit sound card — few current games offer 16-bit sound. That's changing fast, though. It seems reasonable to assume that 16-bit sound will become the gaming industry standard. If you like to look long-range, 16-bit is it.

You In or Out?

Internal or external? If you have a spare 5.25-inch drive bay, consider an internal CD-ROM drive; you may save $50 or more. If your PC sports no open bay, external it must be.

Other considerations include aesthetics and desktop real estate — an external CD-ROM drive clutters up the table, while an internal drive is safely tucked away, out of sight. But you can move an external drive easily to another system, a real plus if you have more than one PC. If you live in two worlds — PC and Macintosh — a standard SCSI CD-ROM drive makes you a switch hitter. The internal/external dilemma is really a decision about spares: spare drive bays and a CD-ROM drive you can spare to share.

Double your speed, double your pleasure? CD-ROM drive performance is climbing as prices are falling. Two significant measures of performance are *average access time* and *sustained transfer rate*.

Average access times — the speed at which the drive locates the appropriate data on the disc — range from as slow as one second to as fast as 265 milliseconds.

But getting to the data is only half the battle. The CD-ROM drive needs to move large hunks of data — graphics images and sound files, particularly. That's where sustained transfer rate comes into play. Standard drives transfer data at about 150K per second, while double-speed drives zip along at 300K per second, a rate that provides for smooth video and animation and excellent sound quality. It can make full-motion video and other multimedia applications truly practical. If you have a choice, a double-speed drive is your best bet.

Pictures, Anyone?

You've probably seen the commercials on TV for Eastman Kodak's new *Photo CD*, which lets you transfer a roll of standard film to a compact disc, then view the snapshots on your television set when it's connected to a Photo CD player.

While Kodak (and others) offers such players, many newer CD-ROM drives meet the Photo CD specifications, too, and so let you look at your snaps from the desktop. With the right software, you can even manipulate the Photo CD images, electronically pasting a beard on Aunt Emily or snipping out an ex-spouse. If you're intrigued by the possibilities of *creating* multimedia, not just playing with it, Photo CD compatibility is a distinct plus in a CD-ROM drive.

Kodak's **Customer Assistance Center** information line (800-242-2424) can tell you whether a particular CD-ROM drive is Photo CD compatible. And Kodak offers a rudimentary Photo CD software driver for Windows, priced at $40.

K I T S G A L O R E

Now that you've got some idea of what you want, let's see what you can get. The following upgrade kits aren't the only ones on the market, of course, but they're an excellent representation of the choices, components, and costs.

Blast Off!

Creative Labs' **SoundBlaster Multimedia Upgrade Kits** offer a standard-speed CD-ROM drive connected to a proprietary SCSI interface on a SoundBlaster or SoundBlaster Pro sound board. Creative offers several kits, each with its own mix of 8-bit or 16-bit sound card, internal or external drive, and bonus CD titles.

The **Edutainment CD-Upgrade Kit** consists of a CD-ROM drive (internal or external), SoundBlaster Pro (an 8-bit board), and speakers, plus an excellent assortment of software titles, including The Animals!, Software Toolworks' Multimedia Encyclopedia, Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe, The Secret of Monkey Island, Loom, Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?, Just Grandma and Me, and Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective. Every title's a winner.

Installing the SoundBlaster Pro and Matsushita CD-ROM drive is straightforward. I managed it on a 486SX system in less than an hour. It would

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

For more than a year now, the buzzword around the PC industry and among savvy consumers has been MPC — multimedia personal computer — a standard developed by Microsoft to promote broad compatibility among competing systems, CD-ROM drives, sound cards, and compact-disc-based software. Most CD titles today are programmed according to MPC specifications (though some use other interfaces). Whether you buy an MPC-compliant computer or upgrade your current machine with individual components or a special kit, the system you end up with should include the following components for full multimedia compatibility:

- Microsoft's graphical Windows interface (with Multimedia Extensions)
- 80386SX microprocessor
- at least 2MB RAM
- 3.5" 1.44MB floppy-disk drive
- 30MB or larger hard-disk drive
- VGA graphics
- mouse
- MPC-compliant sound card
- CD-ROM drive, 150K/second sustained transfer rate or better, average seek time less than one second

have been even faster if the installation guide hadn't been so muddy. The *Getting Started* booklet explains how to install the sound card, then close the case. Turn the pages, though, and you're told "to install the CD-ROM drive and the software drivers for CD-ROM, follow the procedures outlined in the installation notes that come with the CD-ROM drive." Thanks a lot.

Even so, once I connected the drive to the power supply, with the audio connector and SCSI cable in place, and installed the drivers from their floppy disk via a simple menu, the system worked right off the bat. With Window 3.1 already on the PC, I was ready to lay rubber. Fantastic, right?

Not so fast. I had to install the Windows drivers for the SoundBlaster board individually via the Control Panel. Maybe those Macintosh ads are right . . . .

The Edutainment CD-Upgrade Kit is simple to install and works like a champ. (Although my evaluation kit lacked speakers, that was simply an oversight. You'll find a pair in the box. Promise.) A massive collection of software, good sound and drive performance, Windows and DOS compatibility, relatively low cost, and almost foolproof installation make this one an outstanding bundle.

Creative Labs' SoundBlaster Multimedia Upgrade Kits start game players off with an excellent selection of multimedia compact discs. The Edutainment Kit includes the popular 8-bit SoundBlaster Pro audio card.

The Fusion CD 16 combines MediaVision's high-performance 16-bit ProAudio Spectrum card with a capable Sony CDU31A CD-ROM drive. The four CD titles included will keep you entertained and informed.

The Heat of Fusion

MediaVision's **Fusion CD 16** upgrade kit combines a 16-bit ProAudio Spectrum sound card with a Sony internal CD-ROM drive, adds a set of Labtec speakers, and tosses in three CDs (Compton's Family Encyclopedia, Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?, and a combo Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss/ Wing Commander II — all DOS-based titles). That's enough heat to melt your mass at any temperature. Several other available MediaVision kits optionally offer 8-bit sound and internal or external drives.

Using *QuickStart*, a special program included in the Fusion kit, installation was a snap. Unlike the Creative Labs kit, MediaVision's hands you an excellent guide. Slide the CD-ROM drive into any available 5.25-inch drive bay, attach the power lead, and secure four mounting screws. Slip the audio board into a spare slot, connect the audio cable and the data strap to the drive and the sound card. Close cover before striking.

Insert the *QuickStart* floppy and follow the menu. Just think — you'll never need to know what *IRQ* or *DMA* is — or so MediaVision says. It even installs the appropriate drivers in Windows.

The Labtec speakers do the job, but hardly show off your favorite audio CDs or the 16-bit ProAudio Spectrum card. Plug this system into your home stereo system, fire up Wing Commander II, and wait for the cops when the neighbors complain about all the noise.

The Fusion kit provides everything you need to upgrade your PC. The ProAudio Spectrum-16 sound card offers good digital stereo sound; the CD-ROM drive works with DOS and Windows titles; speakers are included; and the installation software and instructions couldn't be better. At this price and with this much performance, the Fusion kit is an excellent choice for entry-level multimedia.

NEC and NEC

NEC Corporation's $999 **Multimedia Gallery** and $499 **CD Express** make for quite a one-two multimedia upgrade punch. Think of them as interesting alternatives, perhaps.

NEC's Multimedia Gallery includes a double-speed CD-ROM drive, a sound board, stereo speakers, and six CD titles. The lower-priced CD Express features ten CD packages — including an interactive storyteller and a reference library —

NEC's Multimedia Gallery offers one of the highest-performance CD-ROM drives available in any multimedia upgrade kit. It uses a standard SCSI interface, for maximum flexibility in integrating with other peripherals.

NEC's CD Express offers a low-cost entry into multimedia. It doesn't include a sound card; instead it uses audio CD for sound. Sound-board upgrades provide room for growth.

and a CD-ROM drive. No sound board, though.

Installing CD Express is about as easy as it gets. The *GeoWorks CD-ROM Manager* helps by providing the graphical interface for the ten CD titles. After you install a SCSI host adapter card in a spare slot, you connect the external CDR25 CD-ROM drive to the card. Plug the drive into an outlet, install GeoWorks and the ten CDs, and you're ready to go.

The kit's lack of a sound board is an obvious problem for anyone who doesn't already have one. On the other hand, if you do have an audio card in your machine, you won't be paying for something you don't need. Without a sound card, you'll hear only digital-audio sound files. Though many popular games and multimedia titles are available in audio CD format, CD Express does limit your options. Overall, it's more suitable for DOS than Windows users.

NEC does offer a "Bundle Up" promotion for CD Express kits, though. Bundle Up gives you some software — Software Toolworks' Multimedia Encyclopedia, Kodak Access Software, and Sampler for Photo CD — and a MediaVision ThunderBoard sound card for only $69.

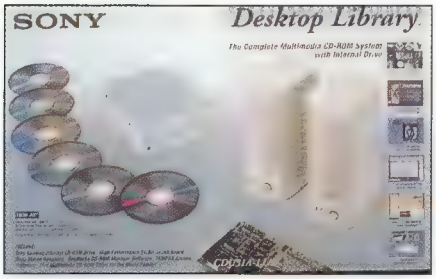
NEC's other upgrade kit, Multimedia Gallery, is fleshed out more fully. Like Fusion CD 16, Gallery uses MediaVison's ProAudio Spectrum-16 audio card. You also get a pair of Labtec CS150s audio speakers and a MultiSpin (double-speed) CD-ROM drive.

Installation is straightforward, but the lack of Windows support appears short-sighted. (You can contact MediaVision if you want to purchase those drivers and multimedia utilities separately.) Dangling from the audio card, the external Gallery's audio cable offers almost as many options as an octopus. Cables for MIDI input and output, a 15-pin connector for a joystick, and stereo line-in cables for external audio devices are all there. It's one slick bundle.

The CDR-74 MultiSpin CD-ROM drive is top-notch. In addition to a 300K-per-second transfer rate, 280-millisecond access time, switchable voltage power supply, CD-ROM XA-ready, Kodak Photo CD single-session support, and MPC compatibility, the MultiSpin is also the only standard SCSI drive among the four manufacturers. The SCSI port lets you daisychain other SCSI devices — CD-ROM drives, scanners, hard drives, and cartridge or tape drives — to the PC. You can move this drive to other standard ProAudio Spectrum sound cards, or even to a Macintosh or Amiga computer. If price is no object and Windows isn't an issue, Gallery is the kit to buy.

On the Desktop

Sony offers three **Desktop Library** multimedia upgrade kits in both internal and external versions. Two of the kits consist of hardware combinations similar to MediaVision's Fusion kits. Both companies use Sony CDU series CD-ROM drives; both use MediaVision's ProAudio Spectrum-16 sound boards. (Sony's third kit, the **Internal CD-ROM Starter Kit**, doesn't include a sound card.) It's no surprise, then, that the most significant difference among the kits from Sony and MediaVision is in number and type of CD titles.



Sony's Desktop Library includes an external CD-ROM drive and ProAudio Spectrum-16 sound card. You can test-drive its Photo CD capabilities, along with six top-notch multimedia titles.

The internal and external versions of Desktop Library share the same software bundle. Two standard references — the New Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia and the 1991 Time Magazine Compact Almanac — provide general knowledge, history, current events, and even some interesting video clips from the CNN Newsroom. Carmen Sandiego lurks here, too, but rather than add more games — like MediaVision — Sony tosses in National Geographic's The Presidents: It All Started with George, and InterOptica's Great Wonders of the World. There's not a Windows title in the lot.

There are windows, but they're disguised by GeoWorks, not Microsoft. Both Sony kits use the *GeoWorks CD-ROM Manager* (also part of NEC's CD Express) to load the compact-disc titles into a menu system during installation. To launch a CD, you just click on an icon. When you leave the CD, you return to GeoWorks. You can even install GeoWorks to run from within Windows, though with the headaches that entails, you shouldn't bother. Who'd want to launch a CD by clicking on two icons — one in Windows to exit to GeoWorks, another in GeoWorks to exit to DOS?

Windows sound drivers are also loaded during installation, making the Sony Desktop Library Windows-ready, too. But without any Windows CDs in the collection, those drivers may gather dust before they see any use. The bundled Tempra Access and Kodak Photo Sampler applications open a window to high-quality photographic images that are especially dazzling when you have an SVGA card in your PC.

Installing the external-drive version of Desktop Library requires two empty slots in your PC, as opposed to one for MediaVision's Fusion. Not only must you connect the drive to the sound board, you must also insert an additional adapter card into the PC. It doesn't make installation particularly difficult, but the two-slot requirement may stymie you if all your PC's slots are already occupied.

The two 3-watt speakers included with the Desktop Library kit are the most respectable ones in any of the bundles reviewed here. Sound quality is decent, even when playing audio CDs, and you can crank 'em up without much distortion. All controls are at the front of the speaker, suggesting that Sony's engineers probably use them themselves.

Sony's Desktop Library is the most full-featured upgrade kit of any discussed here. The only thing missing is a dual-speed CD-ROM drive, like the one in NEC's bundles. The software titles may not appeal as much to hardcore gamers as those tossed in with the SoundBlaster or Fusion kits, but they're perfect for the family looking for multimedia. Sony's Desktop Library is a top-notch entry-level multimedia upgrade kit.

Just Do It

Decisions, decisions. Which of these upgrade kits is the one for you? If your PC already has an adequate sound card — a likely possibility if you play games — then the most affordable upgrade is NEC's CD Express. It's cheap — $500 list, less than $400 on the street — and although the CD-ROM drive isn't up to the MultiSpin's speed, it'll do for games and educational CD software.

Heavy-duty gamers should pick up Creative Labs' Edutainment Kit, primarily because of its software collection. These eight CDs are the start of an excellent multimedia library.

But the overall best buy in an upgrade kit is clearly NEC's Multimedia Gallery. It's pricey — $1000 at list — but the fast MultiSpin CD-ROM drive, Photo CD compatibility, and standard SCSI interface make the Gallery a top-notch pick for long-term use.

In the end, *how* you upgrade your home PC for CD-ROM and multimedia is less important that just *doing* it. Go ahead — climb in and take it for a spin. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

CD Express, $499
Multimedia Gallery, $999
NEC Technologies
1255 Michael Drive
Wood Dale, IL 60191
(800) NEC-INFO
640K IBM PC or compatible
286 or faster

Edutainment CD-Upgrade Kit
Creative Labs, Inc.
1901 McCarthy Blvd.
Milpitas, CA 95035
(800) 998-LABS
$699 internal
$799 external
2MB IBM PC or compatible
386SX or faster

Fusion CD 16
MediaVision
3185 Laurelview Court
Fremont, CA 94538
(800) 348-7116
$699 internal
2MB IBM PC or compatible
386SX or faster

Sony Desktop Library
CD-ROM System
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Circle 37 on Reader Service Card.

DREAM ON,

WALTER MITTY

By Barry Brenesal

Wanna be a football star? Mad scientist? Maybe the Prez?

Thurber would have loved 'em — games that put you in someone else's shoes, games that let you make the decisions. We've got a fistful of sims that'll keep you enthralled.

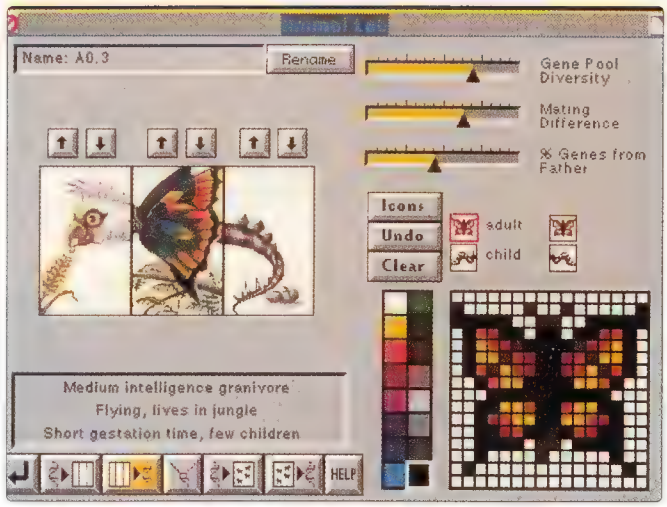
Virtual reality — *VR* to those in the know — is probably the hottest buzzword in technology today. But strange goggles and body suits are still a long, long way from coming home to your living room. Today the *real* VR is on the PC, inside the simulations that are the brainchildren of the best game developers in the business. Whether it's running an atomic reactor or flying a midnight mission over Libya, the latest crop of hi-tech, hi-res sims promise more excitement and realism than ever before.

So what's it going to be? Football star? Five-star general? Leader of the free world? Be patient — it'll happen. For now, let's start with something tame: a scientist who controls and destroys the destinies of entire worlds.

PLAYING GOD

Did you ever play in one of those museums where you worked the exhibits with millions of buttons? They brought science to life in ways stuffed owls and miniature models never could.

Illustration David Pohl
CARIBBEAN
WESTERN ATLANTIC
BASIN



SimLife: Science is fun when you design the ecosystem.

If that's the case, SimLife should be your first trip into virtual reality on the PC. Described as a "genetic playground" — a computerized ecosystem you build from the ground up — SimLife lets you populate that environment with a multitude of plant and animal life forms, life forms you create. Give them dozens of different characteristics and appearances. Mutate them. Genetically re-engineer them. Playing God is a lot more fun than reading high-school science textbooks.

Like SimEarth (and Maxis' classic SimCity), SimLife has little happening down on the planet. Most of the action's in the dozens of colorful command boxes where you design critters, change your universe (even its physics), and monitor progress from multiple vantage points. Help is available everywhere, often by clicking on a command-box name.

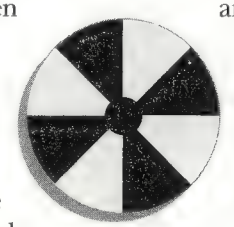
But you probably won't need any assistance. SimLife's controls are very intuitive. Three icon bars manage almost everything, from the addition of new mountain ranges to the birth rate of an insect you just built. To add more moisture to your world, for instance, you simply tap on the up arrow beside the *Raindrop* icon, then move the cursor across the detail map.

Dozens of charts let you compare all kind of facts and figures in this simulation; in fact, they're often the key to successful genetic engineering. You can analyze the food chain for any part of your creation, for instance, or contrast the populations of four animal species across half a century. Three-dimensional bar charts explain what's making a species go extinct. (They don't have to die at all, you know — make them immortal. But provide a very low birth rate, or a very large planet.)

Visual imagination is everywhere in SimLife. Consider the *Evaluation Window*, a report card that states your current score, rating (parking-lot builder, nurseryman, tourist, and so on), and a one-line global status report. The game could just list each ecological niche with its current population: flying mammals, 15; shrubs, 400. Instead, it offers an attractive picture of your personally engineered Eden, complete with various animals and plants and a mountain range in the distance. Forget the mountains, though, and click on a specific animal or plant to see how its niche is doing.

The one drawback to SimLife is its icon-editing screen — it's easy to use, but it unfortunately doesn't permit icon importing. This means that if you want to create a maddened, roving beast and call it Microsoft, you have to design Bill Gates' image yourself.

That's part of the fun in SimLife, but you can go even further in disguising the biological principles behind anything your bizarre little imagination can come up with. All you have to do is design some new icons. Several examples are bundled with the box. The *SimOffice* scenario, for instance, features plants that look like desks, paper stacks, and express-mail packages. Employees (herbivores) consume their work to quite literally stay alive. (Sounds like the *PCGames* office.)



It's a shrewd design. As in any game or simulation, you have to know the rules to succeed, and SimLife's rules are borrowed very accurately from the sciences. You can't help learning at least a little about biology, ecosystems, and species' survival behavior when you play. So watch your graphs, and analyze population growth, feeding patterns, reproduction rates, and food webs. But above all, have fun.

Front Page Sports: Football puts you right on the field for lots of action plus detailed play creation.

WHEN IN DOUBT, PUNT

Football throws down the virtual-reality gauntlet with a vengeance. The constant action makes high-quality visuals vital, and strategic elements are more important here than in any other sport. Until the advent of VGA monitors and 386SX PCs, it wasn't possible to do a game of pigskin justice in a computerized simulation.

A SOUND THRASHING!

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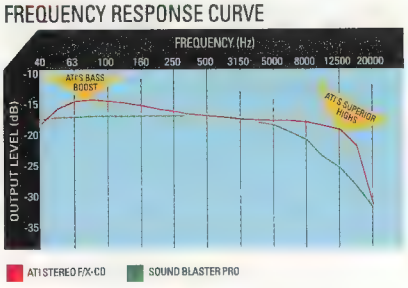
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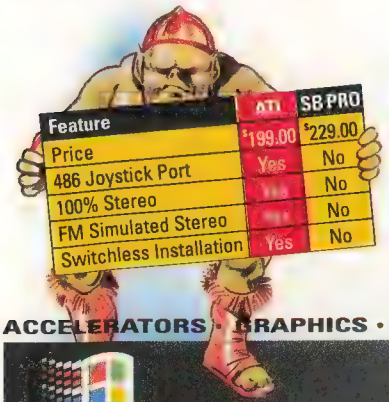

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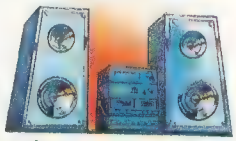

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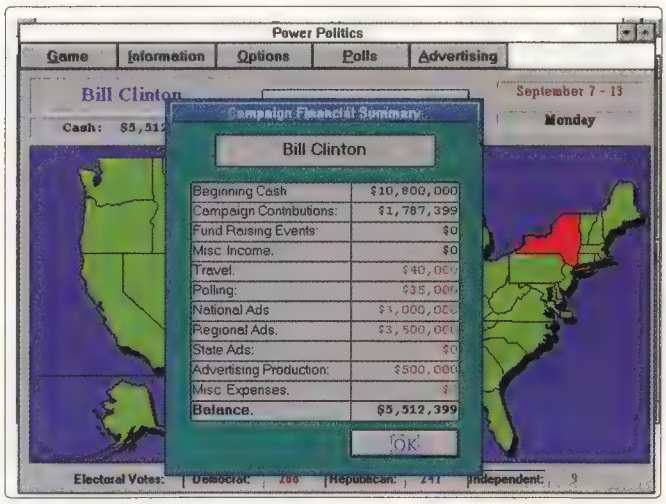
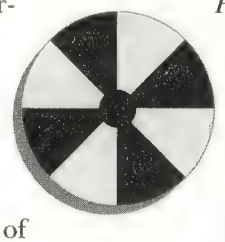


Power Politics: Sell yourself to the voters on today's hot issues.

Front Page Sports: Football changes that. No other football simulation can touch this one's visual reality — it makes a John Madden Football team look like a bunch of hobbits. Dynamix used actual players and referees to create the simulation's 8000-plus frames of digitized animation, and you can view them from nine camera angles. The default view is following the ball, with an overhead arrow that makes tracking easy even during the most furious scrimmage. But you can also switch to a free-floating camera that moves wherever you click. For instant replay, there's an on-screen VCR-style interface, with fast access to the pause function, saved files, standard viewing, normal-speed reverse, fast playback, and slow motion.

As this sim's visuals go, so goes its strategy. Front Page Sports: Football comes close to incorporating a pro coach's decision-making process. The game offers more than 200 enclosed plays to choose from; even better, you can design new plays by editing and saving existing ones, or by creating originals of your own with an easy-to-use play editor. (It quickly compiles complex instructions to individual players out of short phrases such as *Key on X*, *Blitz Fake*, and *If pass, coverage is conservative*.)



If action is more your line, this simulation offers a choice of three modes, ranging from computerized couch potato to total arcade involvement — the latter complete with user-controlled leaps, kicks, dives, tackles, snaps, and four kinds of passes.

Once you've tried all this out during a few exhibition games, it's time to build a league. Front Page Sports: Football lets you define leagues with eight to 28 teams, each with its own configuration of divisions, season length, conferences, and playoff schedule. Choose a preconfigured team or create your own, with players rated individually for speed, acceleration, agility, strength, hands, endurance, intelligence, and discipline. (And don't forget training camp in July to enhance those skills.)

Still don't like your lineup? You've got 47 player slots — 34 assigned, two injured reserve, and 11 open. Consider trading players. Acquire free agents. Compete with other teams for the cream of this season's college and supplemental drafts. Watch out for injuries and aging, though. Even the best team isn't immortal, except in fans' imaginations.

If you want reality, Front Page Sports: Football should rival the TV for football air time. Team members lose energy during play, affecting all their stats; they regain it on the sideline or during halftime. You can call offensive and defensive audibles to change plays on the spot, even call fake audibles to confuse the other side. You can let the computer decide the weather, or specify it down to exact temperature, wind speed, humidity, and atmospheric conditions. If you want to see how the Dolphins play in Siberian temps, go for it.

Front Page Sports: Football works through a series of executable files that access the same data — think of them as several unrelated games, hiding behind a very attractive series of uniform menus. *League/Team Stats*, *Playing Football*, and the *Play Editor* are separate, no two residing in memory at the same time. Each section runs quickly enough once loaded, particularly if you have extended memory to speed up this sim's number crunching. Expect some lags during loading, though — 10 to 20 seconds on a 386SX as you switch gaming areas. This is as close as you can come today to standing on the field at Candlestick, Joe Robbie Stadium, or the Dome-with-a-hole in Arlington, Texas. Front Page Sports: Football has the strategic depth, the arcade action, the extensive team stats, the league competition, and the superb sound and graphics necessary to turn your PC into a virtual-reality machine. The only elements missing are the cheerleaders. You're on your own there.

HAIL TO THE CHIEF

Here's one Windows-based political simulation that operates on a single, simple principle that's held true since Andrew Jackson first assumed office in the 1830s: To become President of the United States, just sell yourself better than your opponents sell themselves. How well or poorly you handle such salesmanship determines your success in **Power Politics**, a simulation that can take you all the way to the Oval Office.

You can go with the default 1992 candidates or any major candidates from 1960 through today. (Note, though, that only the candidates change; all other conditions remain at a constant 1990 level.) Alternatively, you can design your own politician. (Isn't that what all handlers do?)

The Thrilling Sequel to Computer Gaming World's Role-Playing Game of the Year! It's not just a dungeon game anymore!

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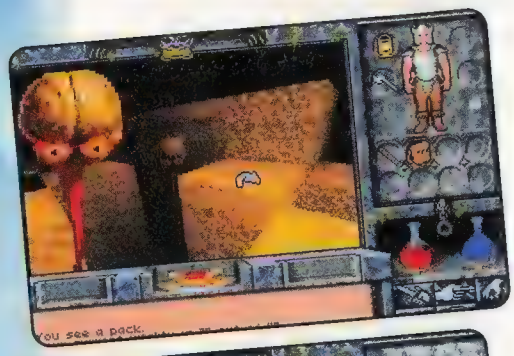

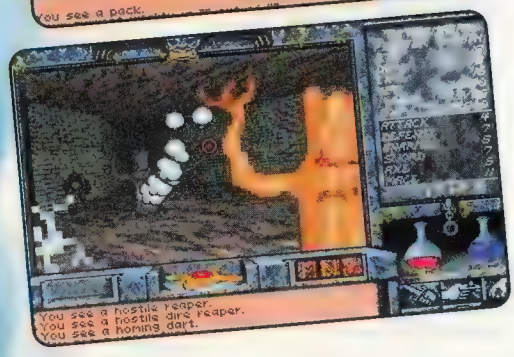

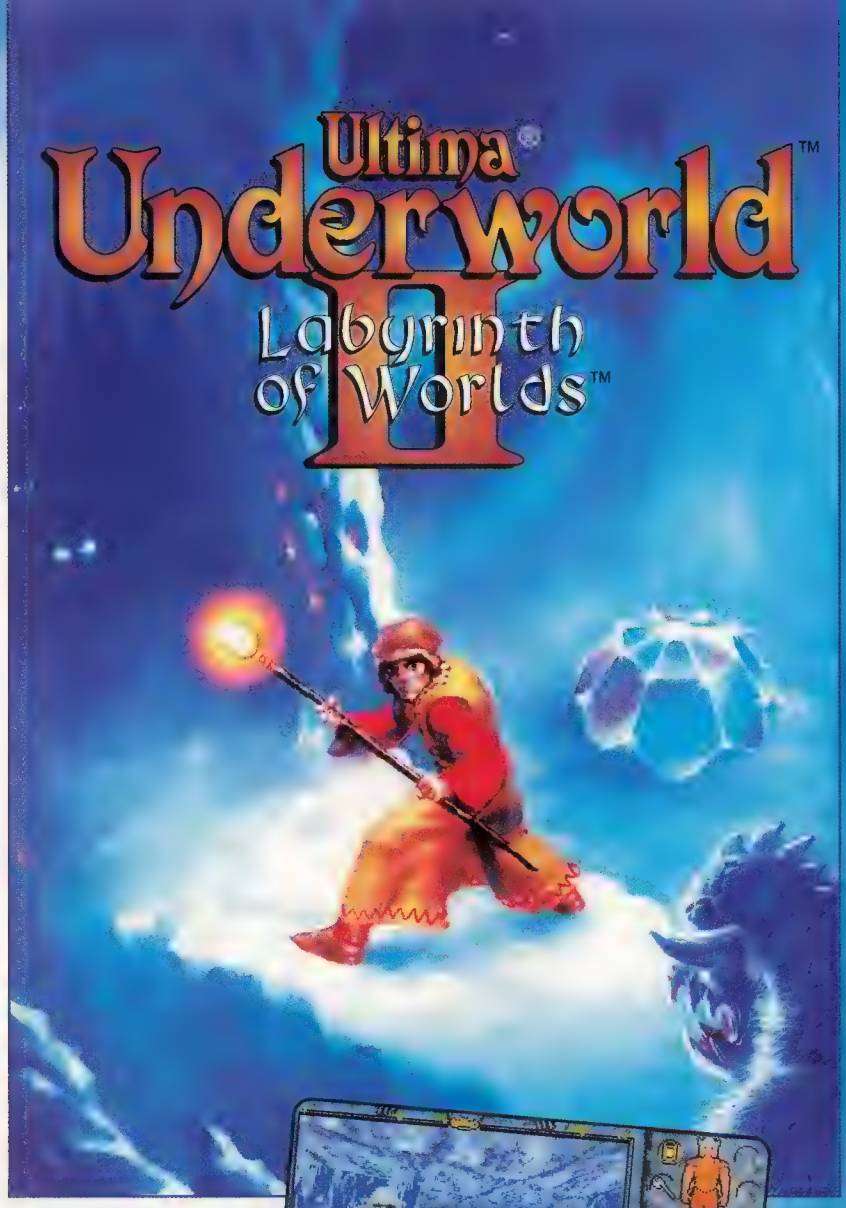

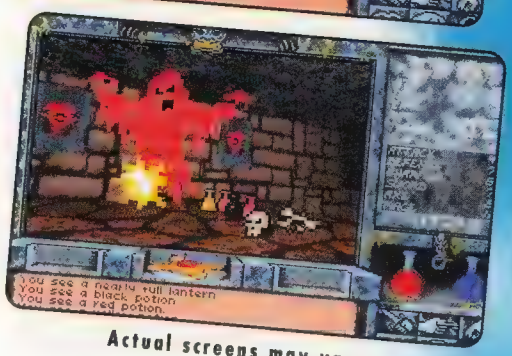

UNDERWORLD The Stygian Abyss™ **was hailed as the first in a new generation of fantasy adventures. *UNDERWORLD II Labyrinth of Worlds* delivers a new, sharply realistic look. With smoother animation, more detailed creatures and a spacious view window, it's the most realistic gaming environment on a PC.**

The world of *Underworld II* is more varied and engaging than ever before. We've added new terrain features (like shifting floors, water currents and thin ice), new spells (like *Shockwave* and *Portal*), new and nastier traps and puzzles, and new creatures (we'll let you discover these for yourself...)

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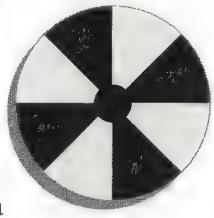
Velikiye Luki, the Big One's infamous Russian Front

Power Politics provides a *Candidate Creator* mode, where you define your hero's or heroine's skill level for ten personal characteristics — including debating, fund raising, and the hard-to-pinpoint charisma factor.

Next, be sure to set game length (four, eight, or 12 weeks), maximum number of debates, degree of the incumbent's advantage, and frequency of random news bulletins.

So much for campaign prep work. Now things get earnest. Every Monday morning before the election, you set your presidential and vice-presidential candidates' daily travel schedules for the week. Veep wannabes can either raise funds or campaign. The main contenders can perform these tasks, rest, and give press conferences.



Power Politics deserves credit for the thoroughness with which it sets about administering these activities. Fund-raising success, for instance, takes into account a candidate's skill, fatigue, and current level of state support, and a state's per-capita income.

Increasing travel distance for a presidential candidate correspondingly decreases your available budget (though the Veep, like some sort of RoboPol, can seemingly fly anywhere free, and he never appears to experience the symptoms of fatigue).

You can generate up to six TV ads during a campaign, including a generic character-boosting kind, as well as others focusing on your issues and your opponent's. You can run an ad nationally, in a specific region, or in a specific state, and spend any amount from $100,000 to half your current campaign chest in a given day or week.

The game also offers national, regional, statewide, and city polls. (Remember, New York City's a very different place from Erie.) There's also a breakdown of all your opinions versus a given state's voters on special screens combing maps and tabular data.

You can hire your own spin doctor, too — anyone from Gypsy Jasmine (mediocre but cheap) to the expensive Baldy Rawlins, who claims he could get Warren Harding reelected.

While Power Politics provides a third-party candidacy, the odd-man-out is only a spoiler. He'll drop from the race at a date you predetermine, several weeks into the campaign. That's too bad, though it does reflect the general belief that you can't win without major party backing and big bucks.

Power Politics is well researched and clever, but the programming shows some sloppy edges. Even after that third-party candidate quits, for instance, his name and a sign for *Planning Campaign Activity* appear every day. More importantly, Power Politics doesn't let you display more than one open window over the national map screen. Because dozens of informational categories — campaign finances, personal health, positions profile, and sleaze factor among them — are listed as separate menu items, you have to open and close a raft of small windows just to get to the basics.

Another problem is a lack of chart legends to explain percentages and colors. If a crosshatch pattern in a state means its votes are up for grabs, what does it mean when there's no pattern at all? Everybody gone on vacation? And when your spin doctor lists seven issues of close agreement between you and a state's voters in bright blue, bright green, and dark green, it'd be nice to know he's not just playing with crayons.

Some memory conflicts from Power Politics' 1.0 release have been fixed in the recent 1.06 version. It remains slow to install and load, though. A new 2.0 version, expected out by the time you read this, will address these and some other problems. (If you buy Power Politics and find 1.06 on the disks, contact Cineplay for a replacement.)

WAR TOYS

"Men grow tired of sleep, love, singing, and dancing, sooner than of war."

— Homer, circa 750 B.C., as quoted by the creators of V for Victory: Velikiye Luki

Nah — only professional mercenaries, arms merchants, politicians, and war gamers enjoy war for more than five sustained seconds. And only war gamers can claim no profit from their favorite activity. They end up losing money, in fact, because of all the war games they buy.

It's an easy market to program for, with a format that's been stable for more than 20 years. Three Sixty's simulation of the Second World War's Eastern Front, **Velikiye Luki**, doesn't break with the past — it enhances it. If this is war, it certainly isn't hell. Instead, it's computerized and state-of-the-art.

The most obvious difference between Velikiye Luki and its direct competition, SSI's war games, is visual.

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MICROLEAGUE
Interactive Software

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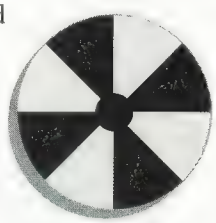
Three Sixty combines discrete, attractive use of a broader color palette with very fine image resolution. You'll appreciate Velikiye Luki's subtly handsome and detailed visuals, and you won't come away from a three-hour gaming session with eyes glazed like donuts.

On a feature-by-feature basis, Velikiye Luki matches or surpasses rival conflict simulations. It offers more than 600 military units — of nine basic types and 60 subtypes — displayed on 12 kinds of terrain. It permits nine forms of combat, including probes and all-out assaults (though less thoroughly trained units are typically more limited). Separate sky and ground conditions affect the success of bomber support and divisional movement. The game even provides weather forecasts, complete with cloud cover and temperature reports.

But those forecasts are far from perfect. In fact, they're usually more accurate for the Germans than the Russians, both because of respective meteorological technologies and the typical west-to-east weather-system flow. That Velikiye Luki acknowledges and mirrors these points is one of its virtues: a desire for realism that amounts to a craftsman's personal pride in his or her work. You may not know about Velikiye Luki's weather or the effect of attachment and subordination commands on supply lines, but the simulation's unseen depths exist all the same, giving it an intangible feeling of "rightness" time after time.



The novice war gamer could easily get lost in all this detail, but Velikiye Luki provides several ways out. One is a tutorial (part print, part electronic) that takes you through the simpler commands.

Three Sixty also supplies a computerized "staff assistant" who can handle anything from routine supply tasks to the entire operation, reducing you to a spectator. It's not a bad way to learn, since you can take back control at any time.

Velikiye Luki comes with seven scenarios, all accurate, playable from either the German or the Russian perspective. These 14 games-within-a-game are rated individually from beginner to difficult. In addition, each scenario lets you change the odds with a number of historically credible variants.

However difficult the scenario or complex the options, Velikiye Luki always handles gracefully. Click and drag individual units for simple movement and attack, for example. Click once on a unit to bring up a command box of more-complex options in the lower portion of the screen.

The only feature Velikiye Luki lacks is a measure of command influence — a historically accurate depiction of the strengths and weaknesses of the line officers in direct command of troops. In a slugfest like the Eastern Front, administrative skills and personal heroism sometimes counted heavily.

But it's a small point next to this combat simulation's real accomplishments. Velikiye Luki continues Three Sixty's V for Victory series just like a phalanx of tanks coming over the hill: It's unstoppable.

NEXT!

What's next in PC simulations? What virtual worlds are there left to explore? How about a turn through the skies in Origin's **Strike Commander**, the long-delayed flight simulator that looks to blow the competition — visually at least — out of the virtual skies? Or **StormKeep**, a role-play graphics adventure from Interplay that ups the ante in first-person perspective? You'll even see swinging swords in front of your face in this one.

Or for something lighter, what about Maxis' **El-Fish**, the aquarium inside the monitor? Not only does it look real, not only can you build your own fish, but tap on the spacebar and the fish spook, just as though you'd tapped on the glass.

Virtual reality is here, it's no dream. You don't even have to look far for it. Just take a peek at your home PC — that's where the virtual action is. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

Front Page Sports: Football
Dynamix Inc.
1600 Mill Race Drive
Eugene, OR 97403
(503) 343-0772
$69.95
640K, 2MB recommended
VGA
supports Roland, SoundBlaster, ThunderBoard

Power Politics
Cineplay Interactive
2580 Northwest Upshur
Portland, OR 97210
(503) 223-4449
$49.95
2MB
requires Microsoft Windows 3.0 or later

SimLife
Maxis Software
2 Theatre Square
Orinda, CA 94563
(510) 254-9700
$69.95
2MB, 4MB recommended
requires 16MHz 386/VGA
requires mouse, hard drive
supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster, SoundMaster

V for Victory: Velikiye Luki
Three Sixty Pacific
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Campbell, CA 95008
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$69.95
2MB, 3MB recommended
supports AdLib, SoundBlaster

SOUND GALAXY

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Circle 93 on Reader Service Card.

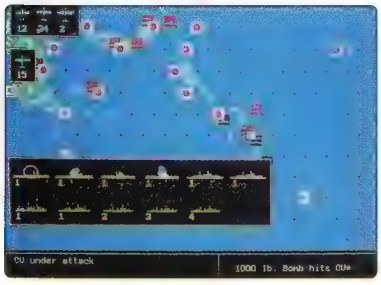
By Peter Olafson

K.I.S.S.

Big games don't have to be a big pain.

They seemed as large as Russia itself. Years ago, I bought a pair of war board games, Game Designers Workshop's *Drang Nach Osten* (German for "Drive to the East") and *Unentscheiden* ("Undecided"). Combined, they formed a re-creation of Germany's Operation Barbarossa, the World War II campaign on the Eastern Front.

We set up the maps on the ping-pong table in the garage (the only place that could hold the game), laid out all the reinforcements on the charts — and never



really got around to playing. I *looked* at it a lot. The prospect was enchanting: the Russian campaign with every last unit in play. But the reality was simply too daunting — man-years of war gaming — and we abandoned it partway through the first turn.

The game remained in place, but the skyscraper stacks of units toppled, maps shifted, dust gathered on the paper steppes, and the game gradually became one with the flotsam that seems to accumulate by default in a garage.

LIGHTEN UP

In theory, that shouldn't happen to a computer game, with a hard drive to hold it all in place, a wicked algorithm to sit in the opposite chair, and a built-in umpire to automate all the nasty arithmetic tasks and enforce all the little rule variants that typically keep your nose in the rule book. (If it's Tuesday, this must be the west bank of the Dnieper.) The computer should make a town car of a game feel like a compact.

In practice, though, even computer war games can be just too damned big. I've played a few of these monsters — **Second Front**, **Western Front**, **Pacific War** — in campaign mode and have still to finish even one. It's not that they aren't great games. I'm not opposed to them in principle — just to the way they practice their art.

The draw of a big war game is powerful: The wider the scope and the greater the depth, the greater the feeling of control. The greater the feeling of control, the greater the sense of responsibility for the outcome, and the less the feeling of having lost, say, the battle of Kursk over a bad roll of the dice. You're really in charge.

That's why I (and thousands like me) keep coming back to them. I always start out with a full heart and a head buzzing with ploys and diversions. But along about the fifth or sixth turn, I begin to feel their size, their manifold obligations, the sheer number of beans begging to be counted. It all begins to weigh on my shoulders. I'm no longer so much a combat general as a supply corporal, and the game I've chosen to play for pleasure has become some chore I have to finish.

> In Pacific War, a bomb-by-bomb simulation of the Japanese/Allied conflict of '41 to '45, a "Teflon" interface makes the game actually playable.

There are ways to make sizable games and still lighten the load. Using smaller scenarios is one method — dashes of conflict with short-term rewards that let you learn the system and the strategy.

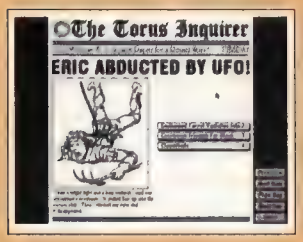
Other ways exist, too. In Pacific War, a mammoth week-by-week and bomb-by-bomb simulation of the Japanese/Allied conflict of 1941 to 1945, a "Teflon" interface — mouse and pop-up menu — speeds things up measurably and actually makes the game playable. Three-Sixty's **V for Victory** series lets you delegate areas of responsibility (or the whole shebang) to your robotic staff — a wonderful idea that merits even more articulation. Your ability in **No Greater Glory** to assign generals and cabinet officers helps make a huge game seem positively tidy. And in **Waterloo**, you send orders to your generals and watch them carry them out.

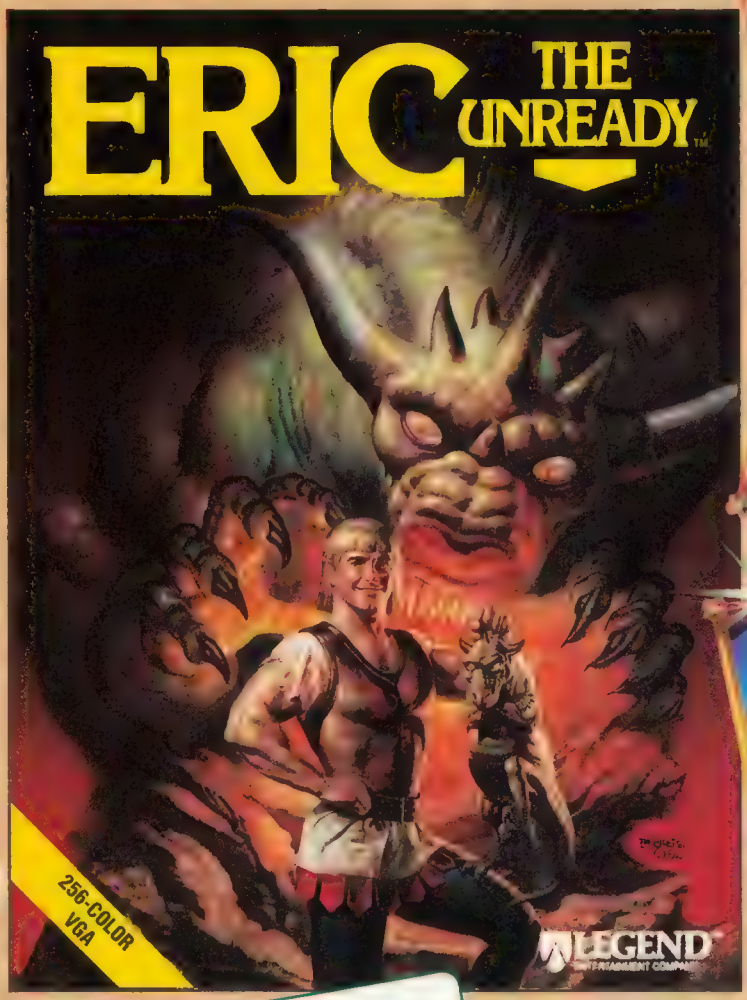
KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID

Now, *that's* a good idea. These giant games are more complex than they really need to be. After all, no one has ever fought a war in the God-like way it's fought on computer. In real life, war is always several removes from the commander in chief; few commanders dabble much in day-to-day detail. I'd love to see a war game that minimizes the burdensome stuff — that's what we have computers for — but plays out the war realistically by presenting intelligence reports, situation maps, and staff relationships.

Keep the size, sure — but time for a little moderation. Time to come in from the garage. ❑

"Catch a dragon? No sweat!"





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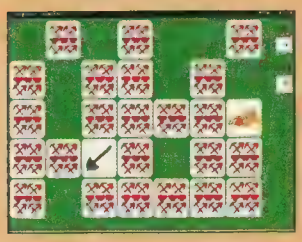

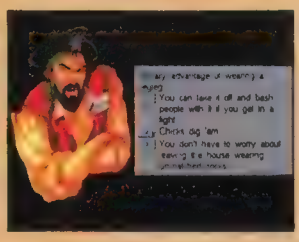

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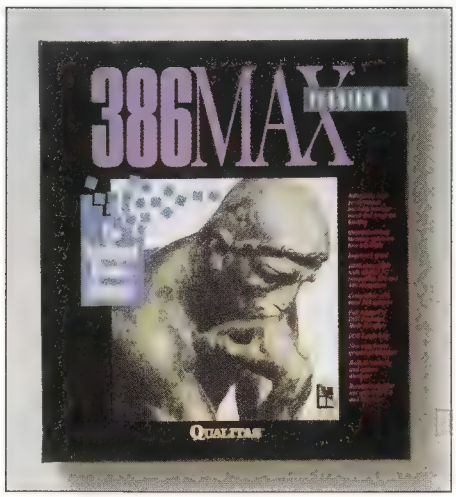
Circle 65 on Reader Service Card.

By Barry Brenesal

THANKS FOR THE MEMORY

DOS 5.0 stinks. Sit tight for 6.0 instead.

Memory makes the (game) world go 'round. We've talked about RAM in previous Peripheral Vision columns. We've considered memory managers, caches, removing memory-resident programs from your AUTOEXEC.BAT file, settling for a lower video resolution, and disabling sound — all techniques you can use to help run the many memory-hogging games now available.



386MAX teaches DOS 3.3 new tricks.

But another problem has sprung up since then, one that afflicts today's most spectacular games. Here's the scenario: You bring home SSI's **Windjammer**, Origin's **Ultima VII**, or Three-Sixty's **Velikiye Luki**. You install it. Then you load in your mouse driver and run the .EXE file. But no game title appears — instead, the only thing you see is a single line of text that says *Insufficient Memory. You need to run MS-DOS 5.0 to use this program.*

5.0? 6.0? 3.3?

When you pull yourself off the floor and check out the box, you find it's true. Some game developers have decided that the best way to supply their products' memory needs is to tie the programming code to MS-DOS 5.0. The idea is that because many folks use MS-DOS 5.0 regardless, they won't have to buy or set up anything else.

But that's wrong. Many PC users are attached to older versions of DOS, particularly DOS 3.3, precisely *because* DOS 5.0's memory-management facilities are hard to set up and notoriously spastic. Because DOS 3.3 doesn't deal with extended or expanded memory, it can team up with a third-party memory manager such as Qualitas' **386MAX** or Quarterdeck's **QEMM** — two popular products with a huge combined installed base. In fact, you'll end up with *more* and better-organized memory using QEMM or 386MAX, because they handle it far more efficiently than MS-DOS 5.0 does.

Get ready to add insult to injury. Some of the games that now require DOS 5.0 may end up crashing spectacularly under DOS 6.0, which is due out in a few months. Why? Because 5.0 uses two internal memory managers, HIMEM.SYS and EMM386.EXE, for extended and expanded memory, respectively. Microsoft finally has seen the light, though, and DOS 6.0 provides a single memory manager that handles both. I'm sure Microsoft will try for as much compatibility as possible between 5.0 and 6.0 — after all, it's in the company's best interest — but nothing's perfect.

So what can you do? For starters, *don't* switch to DOS 5.0 now, no matter what those games are asking for. It's more trouble running high-quality, high-memory-consumption software under DOS 5.0 than it's worth. If you need an operating system with built-in, nonconventional memory-handling capabilities, Digital Research's **DR DOS 6.0** is a better solution. (Note, however, that owing to the acquisition of Digital Research by Novell, DR DOS' future is a bit uncertain.)

If you can wait a few more months, sit tight for DOS 6.0. It's far superior to DOS 5.0 in many respects, especially memory management. And if you don't want to (or need to) bother with an integrated memory-management/operating system, settle for DOS 3.3 and a good third-party memory manager, such as QEMM or 386MAX. Both are easy to set up and to operate; both work well with DOS- *and* Windows-based software.

CAVEAT EMPTOR

Bear in mind that no solution can prevent occasional lockups. It's part of the price you pay for games that swallow all the conventional memory you have, and then some. The best advice is old advice — save your games frequently.

One final suggestion: If you come across a game you *must* have and the company says DOS 5.0 is essential, buy it *conditionally*. (Local retail outlets sometimes let you do that, and then return the package if it doesn't do the trick.) Then call the game publisher's technical-support staff — they may have some work-around advice for your current situation. They may even have a newer version out that fits your current system configuration. ❑

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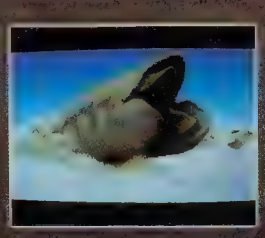

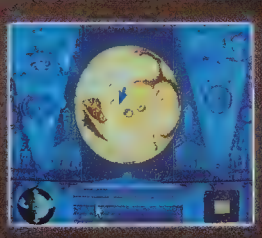

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Circle 21 on Reader Service Card.

By Wayne Kawamoto

SPRING TRAINING

Okay, so they're not as smart as Bob Costas, but sports games can teach you the basics.

So, you're blessed with the strength of an ox, the agility of a gazelle, and the grace of Fred Astaire. Yes, you've lucked out in the genetic lottery of life. You can actually *play* sports.

But strength and agility are about as useful in sports as a hockey player in the penalty box, if you don't know whom to block, can't pick the right club, can't find the hole in the defense, or don't even know which base to throw to. In other words, to play sports you have to know the ins and outs, the all-important fundamentals.

That's where computer sports come in. PC sports games can help you learn the inner workings of a game — the plays, the calls, the strategy — in an interactive format. What if you call this play against that defense? What if you bring in that lefty against this right-hander? PC sports games can complement instructional videos and books and are a lot more fun to boot.

Of course, because computer sports games all work on mathematical algorithms and formulas, their digitized worlds idealize sports — interpret them through the minds of programmers and designers. Even so, working in these textbook worlds is an excellent training ground. According to Electronic Arts' Chris Preimesberger, if you're a rookie, PC packages may be "the best way to become a student of the game without going out on the field. All choices are in front of you. [You can] suffer dire consequences or bask in the glory."

Although computer golf games, for example, are far removed from the physical demands of actually hitting a ball, the best PC golf games, such as **Jack Nicklaus Golf & Course Design: Signature Edition**, **Microsoft Golf**, **PGA Tour Golf**, and **Links 386 Pro**, reproduce faithfully the course-management aspects of the sport.

You must plan your computerized shots much as if you were playing the real thing. Many of these golf games feature real-life courses, something that lets you experiment with an approach, even adjust it somewhat to fit your actual abilities.

If club distances aren't instinctive when you hit the real greens, programs such as PGA Tour Golf show them. Many golf games also suggest clubs for the situation at hand, a feature that teaches what to choose in a real foursome. Away from the course, PC golf is the best classroom around.

Great pigskin picks are just as abundant, and include **Front Page Sports: Football**, **NFL**, **MicroLeague Football 2**, and **John Madden Football II**. Some games, such as MicroLeague, go for the stats, while Madden, Front Page, and NFL go for the stats *and* the action. All go for the details of the game. According to MicroLeague's Brian Posey, "MicroLeague Football 2 has all the correct rules and all the correct formations."

John Madden Football II is the best for team comparisons and coaching strategy. Madden lets you perform head-to-head and helmet-to-helmet matchups to find your opponent's weaknesses. Then you can exploit them with strengths on your team.

Once you develop a strategy based on the matchups, you can test your lineup and call your plays against a stacked defensive line. You can see how the offense works against a 3-4 defense, for example, or change the blocking patterns to see whether or not you can open a hole. If you don't know which play to call, let Madden suggest one. If you get into trouble, just punt.

Games such as **Tony La Russa's Ultimate Baseball**, **Earl Weaver Baseball II**, and **MicroLeague Baseball 4** let you manage statistically based players and teams. You can set the lineups, pitcher rotation, fielding positions, substitutions, and virtually all the things a manager considers on a day-to-day basis. In Earl Weaver, you can play against the man himself to see the calls he would make.

Of course, no computer can replace the acumen gained from actual playing experience. But to learn the basics, in a textbook sort of way, interactive sports software can give you an understanding of the fundamentals and the pacing of the game. It might even help you *play* — and not just on the PC. ❑

If you don't know whom to block, can't pick the right club, can't find the hole in the defense, or don't even know which base to throw to, strength and agility are about as useful as a hockey player in the penalty box.

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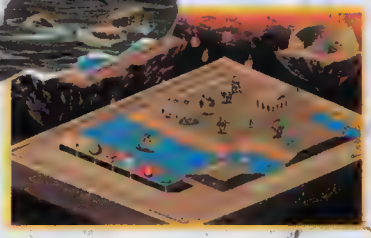

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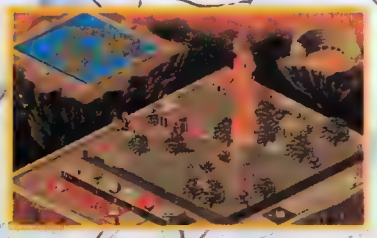

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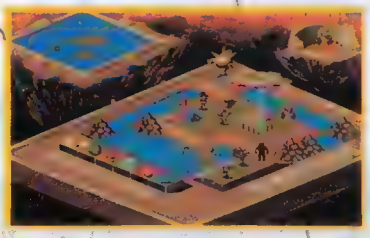

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Circle 60 on Reader Service Card.

Continued from page 38

The game's not tough to learn, although the documentation glosses over some of its finer aspects. The manual lacks adequate illustration — it could use a few screen shots to show on-screen menus and selections. The quick-start section with colorful maps of the playing areas can get you up and running as soon as possible, though.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Because winning depends on points, this strategy war game obediently adds the totals of the towns and castles like a fantasy Lotus 1-2-3. And like a bottom-line statistical baseball game, Conquered Kingdoms shows scoring history at the conclusion of a game, complete with line graphs to illustrate your casualties and use of resources.

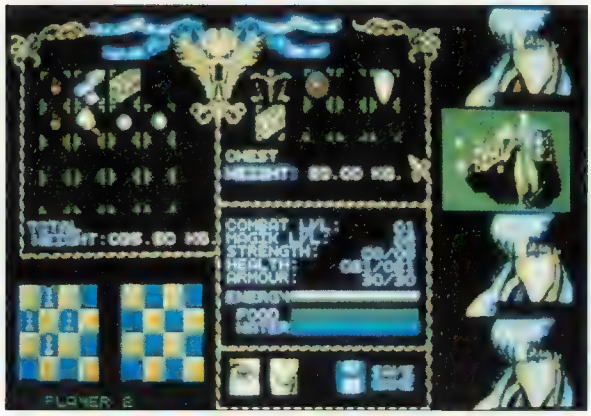
But when compared with the titles coming from companies such as Origin, Mindcraft, and Virgin, Conquered Kingdoms is saddled with primitive graphics images. In fact, the presentation is a throwback, not only to the Middle Ages of gaming, but to PC games of some half-dozen years ago. Crude animations between turns, for example, have little to do with what's happening in the game.

The software supports audio cards, but you're treated to tunes like *Ain't She Sweet* and *I'm in the Mood for Love*. Can you see them as the foundation for, say, Conan the Barbarian?

But even simple graphics images and insipid music aren't enough to destroy a solid strategy game. For fans of QQP's wares — the classic Perfect General and Lost Admiral — Conquered Kingdoms is an engaging turn at master planning without visual overhead. The rest of us? We'd like some sizzle with our steak, please.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Quantum Quality Productions, 1046 River Avenue, Flemington, NJ 08822, (908) 788-2799; IBM PC or compatible, 640K RAM, DOS 3.3 or later; EGA, VGA; requires mouse, hard-disk drive; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster; $59.95



Shadowlands' plot doesn't stand up to the competition.

SHADOWLANDS

By Barry Brenesal

Sometimes it just doesn't pay to argue ownership rights to fantasy real estate with some villainous magician. It's not that you can't beat him — it's just that it isn't worth the effort. The strategy/action game Shadowlands is like that.

DENIZENS OF THE HAIR CLUB

You can tell a lot about a game from the way it looks, and visually Shadowlands is a disappointment. It isn't atmospheric, just dingy, with plenty of washed-out grays, browns, rusts, and blacks. The line drawings resemble a second-stage sketch, rather than a finished product. The images of your four team heroes are identical on the isometric landscape: squat objects with feet that resemble walking mushrooms. They wear coverall cloaks and get very close to their opponents, saving the designers the effort it would take to draw weapons or animated attacks.

Even in closeup, these characters look too much alike. The slight portrait variations the game lets you make are so poor as to verge on the insulting — aside from the characters' four default hairstyles, for example, you can choose between a pair of white fright wigs. (Fitting the rest of Shadowlands' penchant for lack of quality control, these wigs still leave differently colored hair showing from the lower scalp down, as if the game designers couldn't care less — or as if they belonged to the Hair Club for Men.)

Shadowlands' game controls are complex enough to be self-defeating. Instead of a simple attack command, you must highlight the *Action Hand* on a character's *Action Portrait*. (These portraits are four small, identical stick figures at the bottom of the main viewing screen.) Then you click on the figure you want to attack, who flashes white.

Unfortunately, it works only part of the time. Your opponent will flash white, but he may be on the other side of a tree, or across some invisible, programmed barrier. In these cases, your character just stands there, or if you're attacking him, he just dies there.

You're forced to highlight the *Walk Leg* on an *Action Portrait* to maneuver your hero around that tree, then the *Action Hand* again to attack. But don't highlight the wrong hand or leg. Use the other hand, the *Transit Hand*, for collecting and operating. The other leg, the *Lead Leg*, calls the other characters to follow you.

And what's with this idea of individual talents? You determine each of your four heroes' stats — combat, magic, health, and strength — drawing on a pool of available points. Otherwise they're simple clones, called *magician*, *warrior*, *priest*, and *orc*. Orc? Orcs aren't a profession; they're a race. They can be anything: warriors, magicians, TV news anchors, you name it.

Comparisons between Shadowlands and a few other recent releases are telling, and what they tell isn't in Shadowlands' favor. SSI's The Summoning features many of the same ingenious traps, but it's a much more colorful and detailed game, offering four times the number of levels to explore. It has maps, ever-changing weapons and armor, brilliant 256-color VGA graphics, and important interaction between the hero and a host of individually flavored nonplayer characters. None of these

features turns up in Shadowlands. Mindscape's Four Crystals of Trazere has far fewer traps than Shadowlands, but otherwise features identical playing elements. This game's four heroes — each with his or her own fully realized specialty — grab goods, cast spells, fight villains on isometric battlefields, and build enough strength to face the game's Ultimate Evil. Yet Four Crystals is far better drawn, colored, and animated; less buggy; more adventurously designed; and much easier to operate.

Thumbs down, then, on Shadowlands. This game is probably for genre fanatics only.

1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Domark Software, 5300 Stevens Creek Boulevard, Suite 500, San Jose, CA 95129, (800) 245-7744, (415) 513-8929; IBM PC or compatible, 640K RAM, EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster; requires mouse; $39.95

THE MAGIC CANDLE III

By Bernie Yee

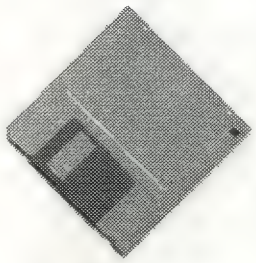
Say hello to another game in an already-too-long line of digital retreads. Mindcraft, creators of the land of Deruvia in the Magic Candle series of fantasy role-playing games, has seemingly followed the trail blazed originally by SSI's Gold Box series: wrap a game engine in more than one set of pretty papers.

STILL THE SAME

Like Waxworks and Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen, just two examples of games that used the same engine as their predecessors, The Magic Candle III moves its characters to another venue. Fans of the series will want to continue the saga with this newest edition, but newcomers looking for the latest technology might be disappointed. The Magic Candle games have never been known for dazzling graphics images or sound, but instead earned accolades for their innovative approach to nonplayer-character management and for their well-scripted story lines. The first title focused on your hero's efforts to re-create a magic candle that imprisoned an arch-demon; the second installment brought the series up to VGA and digitized-sound standards and gave you a chance to solve the mystery behind the disappearance of the first candle's guardians.

Now, in Magic Candle III, your party (headed by Lukas or Luka, the same hero/heroine from earlier installments, whom you can import from Candle II) sallies forth to combat a mystic blight affecting the land of the elves, dwarves, and orcs.

The engine remains essentially unchanged from Magic Candle II, a



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More tales of Deruvia in Magic Candle III.

game that suffered some growing pains. Bugs, incomplete mouse support, and other glitches made Magic Candle II difficult to play without the numerous patches made available later. Magic Candle III suffers from similar problems, although they're not as acute, while some story problems make the game difficult to complete in its original release. (If you have version 1.10, make sure you obtain the latest patch, version 1.15, which is available from a number of sources including CompuServe, GEnie, and America Online.)

Simply installing Magic Candle III can be a nightmare, as my experience attests. One of the initial set of disks refused to install; a second set repeated the problem. A call to Mindcraft revealed that a "sophisticated" setup — one with numerous drivers or other memory-resident software — might cause the installation to fail. Turning to a plain-vanilla boot disk, with only the HIMEM.SYS driver, did the trick.

WHAT'S BEHIND IT ALL?

Magic Candle III's engine and underlying technology are now somewhere between Ultima V's and VI's, but that's not the sole measure of the game. Gone is the paragraph book, though the extensive conversations are kept in a notebook file, which records all words spoken. A bit cumbersome, the notebook system lets you search for key words and delete extraneous entries. The graphics system uses the familiar top-down perspective and tile-style images that display little animation and less detail, but it's brightly done in 256-color VGA. Digitized sound effects remain akin to those in Magic Candle II.

Interaction is still Magic Candle's strength and your primary goal. Nonplayer characters, for instance, provide passwords and clues vital to your quest. And like its predecessor, Magic Candle III lets you send party members off to manage different tasks, such as memorizing spells or earning money, while your character plumbs the knowledge contained within the walls of the libraries.

The interface is a retro menu system that supports the mouse, though somewhat inefficiently — no icons, no drag-and-drop. Automapping is available for certain areas, but is no better than that in the old Interplay role-playing game Dragon Wars. The magic system has remained consistent with Magic Candle II's, and familiar species of mushrooms remain the adventurers' true source of sustenance. Combat is still round oriented and retains Mindcraft's definite quirks. Resurrection, for example, is allowed only immediately after combat — still simply ridiculous.

LAUD AND APPLAUD

Laud Mindcraft for allowing continuity of characters from the three games and applaud it for providing a consistent and stable work throughout the series. This too-often-ignored plot-enhancement technique gives you much more of the sense that you're participating in a heroic life, not just watching an isolated epic or quest and so allows more subtle plot development over the life span of the series.

The physics of the Mindcraft/Magic Candle world also remains consistent, which means veterans of previous games will have little or no trouble adapting to the familiar magic and combat system in the universe. Still, Magic Candles III's plot seems less compelling than II's; it doesn't really carry on the story line of the original Magic Candle and the Four and Forty Guardians.

Magic Candle III offers a proven — still solid and flexible — game engine, and an effective story line to boot. Yet after all is said and done, you may be left feeling unsatisfied. It seems that Mindcraft has done all it can with the current system. Where next for Deruvia?

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Mindcraft, 2291 205th Street, Suite 201, Torrance, CA 90501, (800) 525-4933; IBM PC or compatible, 12MHz or faster, 640K RAM; EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Roland, SoundBlaster; requires hard-disk drive; $59.95

MILLIE'S MATH HOUSE

By Gregg Keizer

Everybody wants a piece of that old home pie. Home-learning pie, that is. Blink or turn your head, and there are another couple of publishers with dollar-sign dreams who think they can make a buck off guilty parents. Everybody with the gall to tack the label "learning" onto a game is in on the action. Edmark, however, comes through in its premier education effort, Millie's Math House.

MOOO! U

It's only natural to have a healthy bit of skepticism when you first see the name *Edmark*. The name sounds too calculated for its own good. But Edmark has a worthy pedigree and, with its Millie's Math House, a worthy début into the hurly-burly world of home-learning software for the PC. Millie's Math House is cute, talks up a storm, and, though it may lack some graphics punch, is educationally rock-solid.

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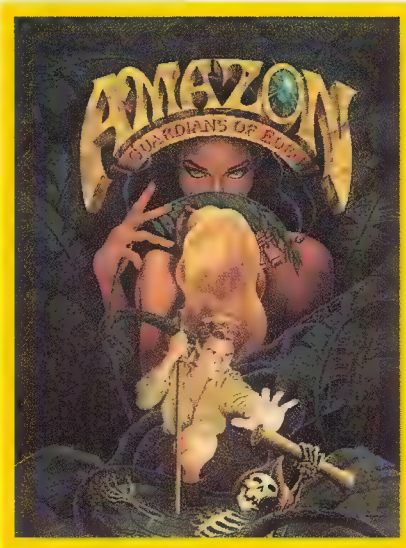

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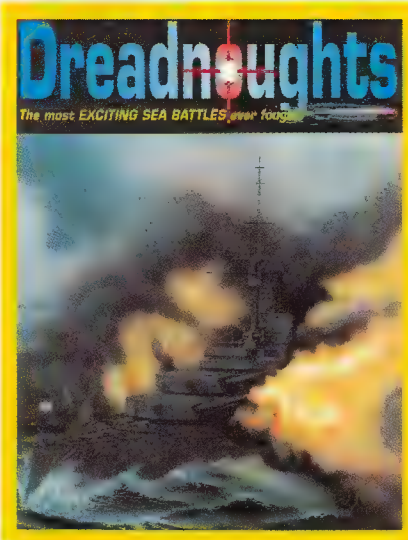

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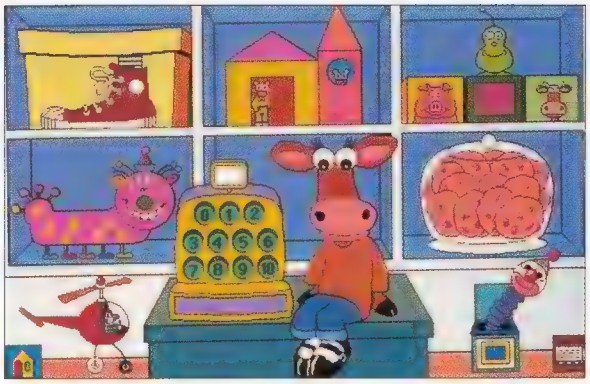

In Millie's Math House, colorful characters, speech, and plenty of encouragement make learning fun.

Millie's Math House features, of all things, a talking cow (Millie). Okay, Boomers like me grew up listening to a talking mouse (Bullwinkle), a talking horse (Mr. Ed), even a talking bear (Yogi). But a cow? For kids aged 2 to 6, the target age group of Millie's Math House, the species probably doesn't matter. They just want to get to the good stuff.

But only after Mom or Dad has installed the program. Thanks to copious digitized speech, Millie's needs nearly 3 megabytes of space on your hard-disk drive. The installation procedure itself, though, is a snap; all but the floppy feeding is automatic. The only thing you've got to know is the type of printer next to the PC, and the kind of sound device inside it.

Millie's Math House uses the same box-like interface that Davidson popularized years ago with its Blaster series. Click on any of the six areas on the *Main Room* screen and you're transported to one of the program's activity areas. There are a couple of distractions here — click on the toy helicopter or the jack-in-the-box to light up your child's eyes — but they're pale imitations of what kids find in something like Broderbund's Treehouse or Playroom.

Each of the six activities in Millie's Math House concentrates on a particular set of skills. All, obviously, have something to do with numbers, though some stray further away from 1-2-3 than others. All talk, assuming you have a capable sound board or device tucked inside the PC. And all are engaging enough to captivate their audience (though maybe not keep a parent's attention for long).

Little, Middle, & Big asks kids to match shoeless, blob-like creatures with the right size brogans. The idea, naturally, is to pick a midsized shoe for the midsized creature, pick a small shoe for the small creature, and so on. Like all the activities in Millie's Math House, this one talks up a storm. *"I'm Little. I need shoes,"* the smallest blob says when you click on it. The speech that came out of a SoundBlaster-compatible card was clear and distinctive, but it was somewhat tougher to make out over a Disney Sound Source.

Other activities concentrate on such things as geometric shapes, pattern recognition, number-object relationships, and simple counting. Each of these "rooms" in Millie's Math House offers colorful characters or screens, speech, and plenty of encouragement when you pick the wrong selection. There's no bad-buzzer sound or negative feedback in Millie's world.

Some of the rooms go even further, letting you replace existing sounds with ones you record yourself. You'll need a SoundBlaster- or SoundBlaster Pro-compatible audio card for this, as well as a microphone jacked into the card, but the extra effort is worth the trouble. In *Bing & Bong*, for instance, the package's pattern-recognition module, you can substitute anything you want for the generic animal sounds. One kid playtester, for example, delighted in making the pig symbol say *"Ouch!"*

And each area in Millie's Math House is actually a two-in-one bargain, for you can play in what the program calls the *Question and Answer* mode or an *Explore and Discover* mode. In the former, the on-screen characters ask kids questions — using digitized speech, naturally — while the latter lets children wander around,

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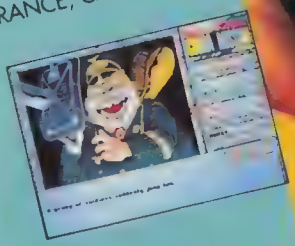

ACTUAL VGA SCREEN IMAGES

System requirements: 286 or faster machine with 640K RAM; hard disk with min. 12 megabytes of available space required, mouse recommended. Graphics compatible with EGA, MCGA and VGA (VGA highly recommended). **Sound support:** Sound Blaster Pro, Adlib Gold

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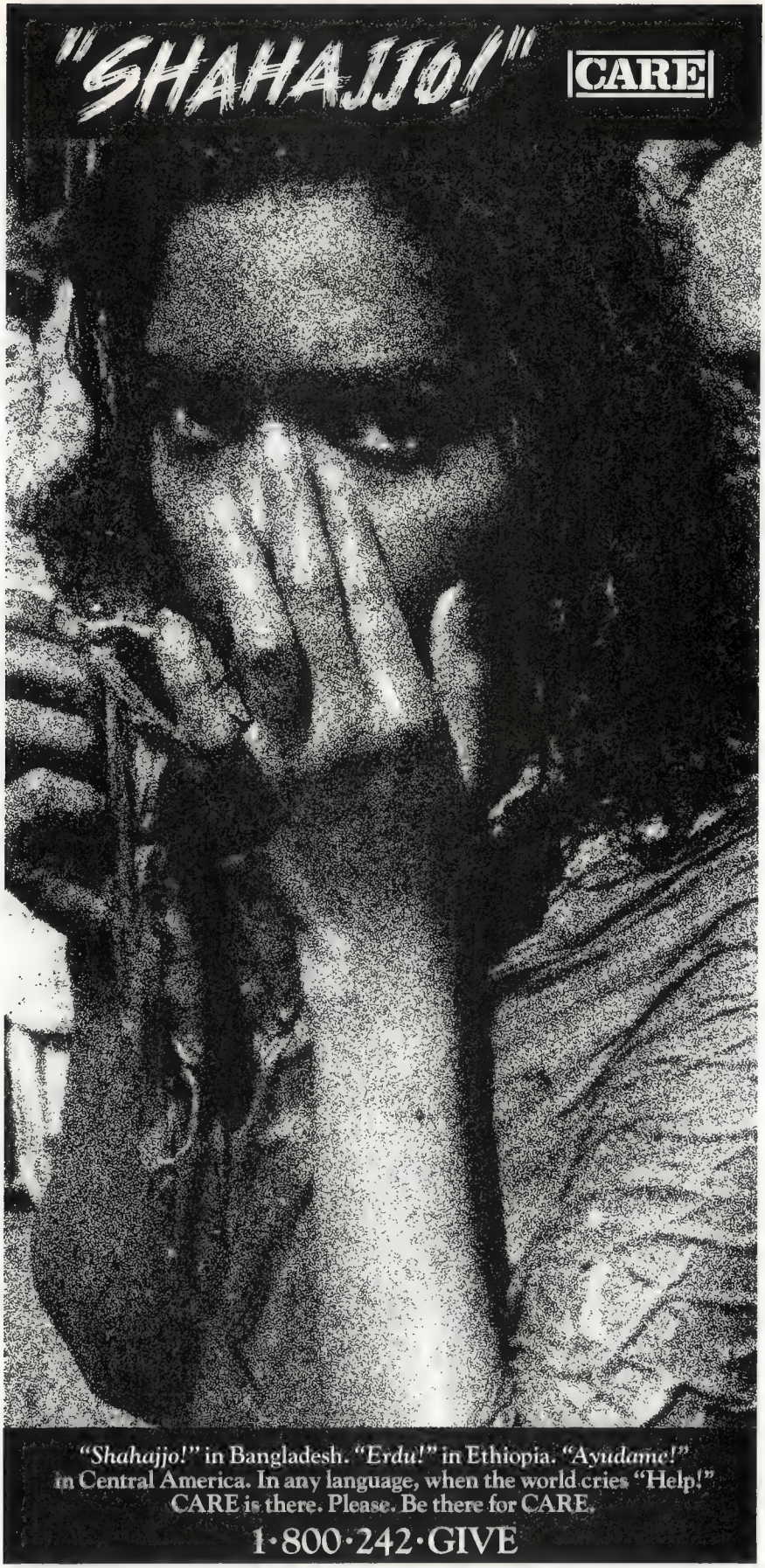
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clicking and discovering as they go.

The most intriguing part of Millie's Math House is the *Mouse House*, an activity that surreptitiously revolves around geometric shapes, which kids use to erect buildings according to a variety of blueprints. *"Please give me a small circle,"* Mr. Mouse might ask, and the child can drag the appropriate shape atop the blueprint. Pieces even snap into place, so young children don't have to be exact. When they're done, they can print the results (as they can in the *Build a Bug* sequence) for later coloring with markers or crayons.

Parents will find the on-line help useful. Accessed through a three-key combination (to keep kids out), this module offers basic directions and some tips for play both in school and at home.

Here, too, you can set Millie's Math House to scan. When scanning's turned on, the cursor jumps from one choice to the next. All that's needed is a click at the right time. It's nice to see a commercial program with built-in assistance for kids with disabilities.

Millie's Math House wins points on almost every front. Only the graphics images, which have a one-dimensional Richard Scary-style look to them, seem behind the times. They're cute, certainly, but not as rich or fully formed as those in programs from certain other educational software publishers, such as The Learning Company.

Edmark, the creator of Millie's Math House, may want a piece of the home-learning pie, but unlike others now entering the market, it's welcome to more than a single slice. ❑

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10

Edmark, 6727 185th Avenue NE, Redmond, WA 98073, (800) 426-0856, (206) 556-8484; IBM PC or compatible, 640K RAM; EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, Digispeech, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, Sound Source, Speech Thing, ThunderBoard, Voice Master, Tandy sound; requires mouse, hard-disk drive; $49.95

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PC GAMES EDITORS' Choices

GIZMOS AND GADGETS

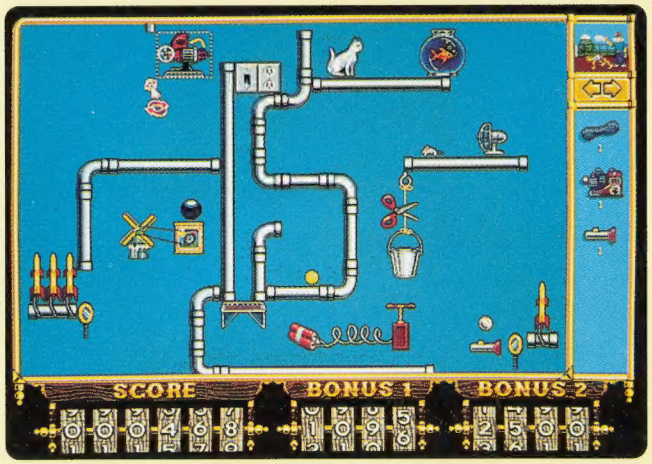
By Lafe Low

Imagine a machine of amazing complexity and what comes to mind? A Ferrari? A space shuttle? A nuclear reactor? How about something from the inner workings of Willie Wonka's chocolate factory? If that last one sounded right, you'll delight in the wondrous contraptions you can assemble with **The Incredible Machine**.

The Incredible Machine really isn't a machine at all until you put it together. You start with a collection of parts and pieces that look like a pile of wares at a yard sale, and through a series of 75 puzzles and tasks you assemble your incredible machine using ropes, pulleys, levers, gears, and any outrageous combination of the components in your bin. The resulting thingamajig is hilariously complex.

Most of the contraptions you build resemble a Rube Goldberg cartoon. They're filled with ramps and levers, bouncing balls, windmills and bellows, magnifying glasses that refract light to ignite fuses, mice running on treadmills to generate electricity, gears, ropes, rollers, conveyer belts, and trampolines — any sort of bizarre machinery to accomplish what at first seems like a simple task. Once you've accomplished your goal (which may be anything from knocking a bowling ball into a pit to bursting balloons to getting a series of gears to turn), you'll receive a password that'll let you return to that puzzle or jump around to others you've already solved.

You'll find the bits and pieces in the tool bin on the right side of the screen. Each puzzle provides the appropriate types and number of parts to complete the machine successfully, so you always have what it takes. For the most part, you won't be able to build the right gizmo if you leave anything out.



Get some sleep now — you'll need it. The Incredible Machine's delightfully wacky widgets are as fun to watch in action as they are to create.

One of your first jobs is to figure out what all the components of your incredible machine do *before* you use them. Some of the parts are pretty easy to understand. The ramp is simply an incline, for example; a ball rolls down left or right, depending on how you place it. You'll scratch your head over some of the pieces, though. For instance, it's easy to tell that a mouse-powered generator is a mouse on a treadmill inside a box. It might take some experimentation, however, to realize that something (such as a ball) has to shake the cage before the mouse will start running. And some parts, like the magnifying glass, work only in concert with others. Throughout it all, the accompanying music revs you up, with each puzzle playing its own jazzy soundtrack.

When and if you tire of the puzzles, or if you just want to experiment with the vast array of parts and pieces at your disposal, you can also build in free-form mode. This is where your incredible machines can get really out of hand.

Besides having the entire arsenal of incredible parts at your disposal, you can also adjust the gravity and atmospheric pressure of the machine environment in free-form. That makes a big difference if your machine depends on trampolines, falling bowling balls, or floating balloons. You don't even need to have a task or goal in mind. Just pull some pieces out of the tool bin and throw 'em together — it's bound to build something.

You're graded on time as well as completion, but don't expect to whiz through these puzzles like just so many levels of a shoot-'em-up. This game takes patience and a clever eye. You'll have to sit back, analyze the problem, look at the available parts, and execute your plan carefully. The Incredible Machine is a bizarre combination of arcade frenzy and strategy that'll hook you for sure. It's like being a mechanical engineer in *Alice in Wonderland*. The only missing link is a set of hints, but then again, Leonardo da Vinci, Ben Franklin, and Thomas Edison didn't have hints when they were inventing incredible machines.

This one qualifies as another sleep stealer in the tradition of Tetris and Arkanoid. So get plenty of shut-eye now, then start dreaming up some of those incredible machines. ❑

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible, 386SX or faster, 640K RAM; VGA; requires mouse, hard drive; supports AdLib, Pro-Audio Spectrum, Roland MT-32, SoundBlaster, ThunderBoard; off-disk copy protection; $49.95

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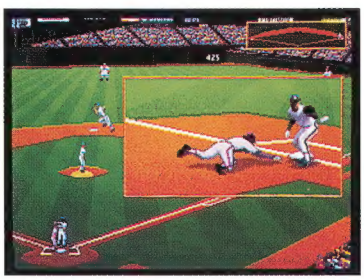

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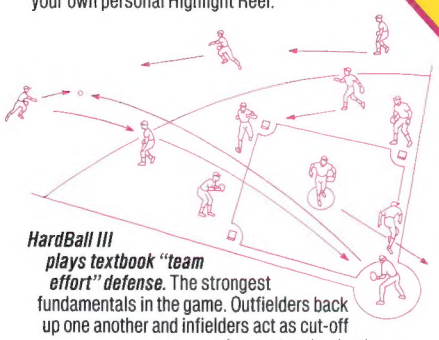

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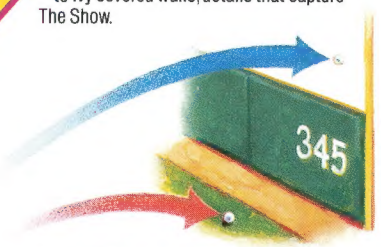

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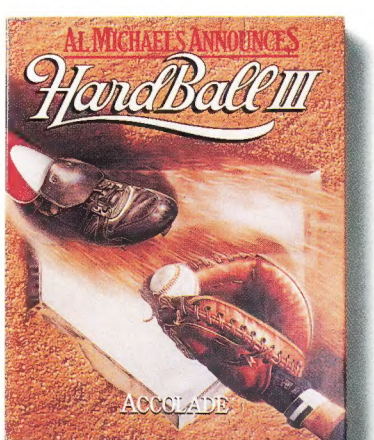

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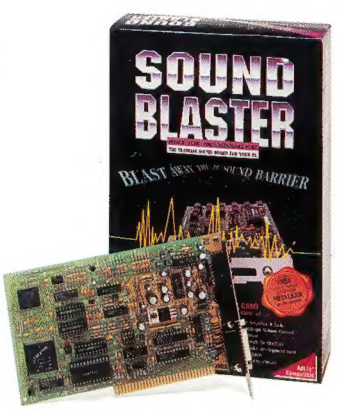

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